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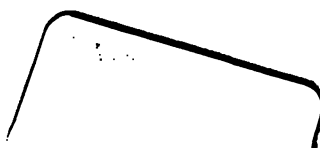




THE
ENTIRE WORKS
OF THE
REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.
WITH COPIOUS INDEXES,
PREPARED BY THE REV.
THOMAS HARTWELL HORNE, B.D.



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1 CHRONICLES.

CCCLXXXIII.

THE PRAYER OF JABEZ.

1 Chron. iv. 10. *And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.*

REMARKABLE is the honour which God puts upon prayer, and numberless are the instances which are recorded of its efficacy. Jabez is here mentioned in a long catalogue of names; but while the names only of others are recorded, he is particularly noticed: he is even declared to have been more honourable than all his brethren. This distinction indeed might be given him on account of his primogeniture, but it was certainly still more due on account of his piety; like the patriarch Jacob, he “wrestled with God, and prevailed”—

I. The prayer he offered,

1. The subject-matter of it—

[In its primary sense it evidently related to *temporal* blessings. God had promised his people an inheritance in Canaan, but they were not able of themselves to drive out the inhabitants. Jabez therefore, sensible of his insufficiency, prayed to God for help. He begged for the blessing of God upon his own endeavours: he desired to be preserved from the dangers to which his military exploits would expose him; and to have, through the divine interposition, an enlarged inheritance in the promised land. These requests he urged with a significant and earnest plea*.

* Almost all Hebrew names had some peculiar signification. Jabez signifies sorrow: the name was given him in remembrance of

But there is reason to think it had also a *spiritual* meaning. The earthly Canaan was typical of the heavenly kingdom. The enemies also that were to be driven out, were typical of the enemies with whom the Christian has to contend. Moreover, the assistance, which God rendered to his people, was intended to shew us what aid we might expect from him. And what evil will a child of God deprecate so much as sin? Surely nothing is so "grievous" to him as the prevalence of corruption^b. Well therefore may Jabez be considered as looking beyond this world, and as imploring a secure possession of his heavenly inheritance.]

2. The manner in which it was offered—

[It is the sentiment, rather than the expression, that gives excellence to prayer; but in both respects we may admire that before us.

It was humble. He felt his entire dependence upon the power and grace of God. This is intimated not merely in the petitions offered, but in the very manner in which they were offered—"Oh that," &c. Such humility is absolutely necessary to render prayer acceptable. The more we abase ourselves, the more will God exalt us. Let this be remembered in all our addresses at the throne of grace.

It was importunate. He enforced his request with a very earnest plea. Nor, in reference to sin, could any plea be more proper for *him*. But *we* may also properly deprecate sin as "grievous" to our souls. Yea, a disposition to do this is both an evidence of our sincerity, and a pledge of the divine acceptance.

It was believing. The title, by which he addressed the Deity, argued his faith in God. It expressed a confidence in God as the hearer of prayer^c. It is in this way that we also should approach the Deity. Without such faith our petitions will have but little effect; but with it, they shall never go forth in vain^d.]

Prayer possessing such qualities could not fail of success :

II. The success with which it was attended—

We have no detailed account of God's kindness towards him, but we are informed that "God granted

the unusual sorrows his mother endured in childbirth. And it was in reference to this that he deprecated the evils to which he was exposed; "Keep me," &c. lest I be Jabez in my *experience*, as well as in my *name*.

^b Rom. vii. 24.

^c Gen. xxxii. 28.

^d Mark xi. 24.

him all that he requested," and this speaks loudly to us—

It shews us,

1. That we ought to spread all our wants before God in prayer—

[We have seen how comprehensive the prayer of Jabez was. And ours also should include our every want, temporal, spiritual, and eternal. There is nothing so great, but we are at liberty to ask it; nor any thing so small, but we must acknowledge our entire dependence on God for it. In fact, there is nothing great or small, either before God, or in reference to ourselves: for, as all things are alike easy to him, who formed the universe by his word, and watches over the very hairs of our heads, so there is nothing, however minute, which may not prove of the utmost possible importance to us, as every part of the inspired volume attests. The direction of God to us is, "*In every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God^e."]

2. We should urge our petitions with an importunity that will take no denial—

[So did Jacob; "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me^f." And so it should be with us. We have, in fact, a better plea than Jabez was able to offer. We may go in the name of Jesus Christ, and plead all that he has done or suffered for us. We may look to him as our Advocate with the Father, and assure ourselves of the acceptance both of our persons and our prayers through his continued mediation and all-prevailing intercession. The conduct of King Joash should be a warning to us. The Prophet Elisha told him that he should smite the Syrians who had sorely oppressed the whole Jewish people: and he bade him to smite the ground with the arrows which he had in his hand, and thereby to express the desires and expectations which he felt in reference to this great event. The king smote the ground only thrice, when he should have smitten it five or six times; and thus by his own want of zeal he restrained the exertions of Almighty God in his favour^g. And thus it is that we act. If we were more earnest in our desires, and more enlarged in our expectations from God, there would be no bounds to the mercy which God would exercise towards us. "We are not straitened in him, but in our own bowels." Were we to "open our mouth ever so wide, he would fill it^h."

^e Phil. iv. 6.

^f Gen. xxxii. 26.

^g 2 Kings xiii. 20.

^h Ps. lxxxi. 10.

We might ask what we would, and it should be done unto us¹.]

3. We should ask in faith nothing doubting—

[A doubting mind will rob us of all blessings, and make our most urgent prayers of no effect^k. We must “believe not only that God is, but that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him^l.” Yea, we must “believe that we *do* receive in order that we *may* receive.” And “according to our faith it shall be done unto us.” In fact, there is a kind of omnipotence in the prayer of faith, and, if I may so speak, God himself *cannot*, I may surely say, *will not*, reject it. He speaks as if it had a *commanding* power^m. Of course, this idea must not be pressed too far: but we are sure that, as God never did, so he never will, say to any of the seed of Jacob, “Seek ye my face in vain.”]

APPLICATION—

[Is there then any Jabez, any son of sorrow, here? Go to God, the God of Israel, and say, “Oh that thou wouldst bless me indeed! Let me be strengthened by thee for all my spiritual conflicts. Let mine enemies, my indwelling corruptions, be slain before me.” And let me be put into full possession of the heavenly Canaan, where I shall rest from my labours, and be for ever happy in the bosom of my God.” Then, brethren, shall your every request come up with acceptance before God, and return in blessings upon you to the full extent of your necessities.]

^l John xiv. 13, 14. ^k Jam. i. 6, 7. ^l Heb. xi. 6. ^m Isai. xlv. 22.

CCCLXXXIV.

THE PROPRIETY OF CONSIDERING TIMES AND CIRCUMSTANCES.

1 Chron. xii. 32. *The children of Issachar were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.*

THE doctrine of expediency is of difficult investigation: but it is highly deserving of our attention; because the greater part of our conduct in every situation of life depends upon it: and it is no small honour to the tribe of Issachar, that they were distinguished above all the other tribes of Israel in practical acquaintance with this important branch of human knowledge. In the account given of the

other tribes who came to David to Hebron, we are merely told, how many they brought with them to place David on the throne of Israel : but in relation to the tribe of Issachar we are informed, that they acted from a dispassionate consideration of David's claims, as compared with those of the house of Saul, and from a full conviction, that, in supporting David, they performed an acceptable service to God himself.

From the character here given of them we shall take occasion to shew,

I. That our conduct must often be affected by times and circumstances—

We are in the midst of a world changing every moment, ourselves also changing with the things around us. Hence arises a necessity of attending to times and circumstances in our concerns, of whatever nature they be :—

1. Civil—

[It is the knowing how to judge of the various occurrences that arise, and how to improve them to the good of the state, that constitutes the great science of politics : and it is to this knowledge, that the expression of “understanding the times” primarily refers*. A statesman cannot determine what will be fit to be done a year hence, because circumstances may arise which would render all his plans abortive. He may indeed display much wisdom in the exercise of foresight, and in providing for contingencies ; but still he must of necessity follow events which he cannot control, and be himself controlled by existing circumstances : and he is the greatest benefactor to the state, who is enabled to judge of them most correctly, and to adapt his measures to them most wisely.]

2. Social—

[All of us have, as it were, a little world around us, wherein we move ; and all experience the same vicissitudes as are found in larger communities. In our families, innumerable things arise from day to day, which require us to vary our line of conduct. Sometimes ease and gaiety may become us, and at other times seriousness and reserve : sometimes a yielding spirit will be proper, and sometimes it will be necessary to be firm. It is no little wisdom to know how to conduct ourselves towards persons of different dispositions and of different habits :

* See Esth. i. 13.

but we should labour diligently for the attainment of this wisdom, because the happiness both of ourselves and others most essentially depends upon it.]

3. Personal—

[It is obvious, that a very different deportment becomes us in youth and in age, in prosperity and adversity. Solomon tells us, that “there is to every thing a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven^b” — — — To discern all these occasions, and to improve them aright, is the grand line of distinction between the thoughtless and considerate, the fool and the wise^c.]

But if our conduct must be influenced by them in temporal matters, there is still reason to inquire,

II. How far it may properly be affected by them in the concerns of religion—

That we may attend to times and circumstances, is certain—

[This appears both from the example of Christ and his Apostles, and from many plain directions given us in the Scripture. Our blessed Lord at one time was silent before his accusers, (“insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly,”) and at another time “witnessed a good confession before many witnesses:” at one time he hid himself from his enemies, and at another delivered himself into their hands: at one time delivered his instructions darkly in parables, and at another spoke “plainly and without a parable.” In like manner St. Paul did not deem “all things expedient that were lawful^d,” but would sometimes conform to the ceremonial law, and at other times neglect and even oppose it; at one time sanctioning circumcision, and at another withstanding it with all his might: and in his ministry he would set before his audience milk or strong meat, according as he saw occasion. So all the Apostles were to fast indeed, but not whilst the bridegroom was with them.

Such conduct is also prescribed to *us*. We are to recommend religion to the uttermost; but “not to set our pearls before swine:” we are to enforce the practice of it in its utmost extent; but not to put new wine into old bottles: we are to “answer a fool at one time according to his folly;” and, at another, “not according to his folly.”]

^b See Eccl. iii. 1—8.

^c Eccl. ii. 14. Prov. xxii. 3.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 12. and x. 23.

But how far we may attend to them, is not easy to determine—

[Every distinct case must be determined by the peculiar circumstances that attend it: it will be in vain therefore to descend to particulars. We may however lay down one general rule, which will be of service in determining most of the cases that can occur. *The consideration of times and circumstances is never to affect our principles, but only the application of them.*

Our principles must be fixed by the unerring standard of God's word. The love of God, and the love of our fellow-creatures, a regard for truth, and honour, and integrity, with all other Christian graces, must be as fixed principles in our minds, from which we are never to swerve on any account. We must not regard life itself in comparison of these. But then the peculiar mode in which these principles are to operate, must be a matter of discretion, arising from the circumstances of the case. And herein is the difference between a novice in religion, and one who has been long walking in the ways of God: the love of the more advanced Christian has "grown in knowledge and in all judgment;" "he discerns" more clearly than others "the things that differ;" and is enabled to combine, what we should always study to unite, "the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove."]

It being clear, then, that our conduct may be affected by them, we proceed to shew,

III. What there is in the times and circumstances of the present day to affect it—

There is no little resemblance between the times of which our text speaks, and of the times wherein we live*.

The elevation to the throne of Israel was typical of the elevation of Christ to an empire over the souls of men—

[Christ is the true David, to whom all the tribes of Israel must bow†. A long series of prophecies have foretold his reign; and have given us reason to expect that that reign shall be universal — —]

* Any circumstances that may have occurred, as sudden deaths, &c. might here be brought forward, as motives to exalt Jesus to the throne of Israel.

† Hos. iii. 5. Isai. xlv. 23—25.

And the circumstances of the present day loudly call upon us to install Jesus in our hearts—

[Never since the Apostolic age was there such a zeal for the Bible as at the present day. Princes and Nobles, no less than the ministers of religion themselves, are expatiating on its value, and commending to us the Saviour, as therein revealed. When all the tribes then are uniting in this blessed object, shall not we concur to the utmost of our power? True indeed the numbers belonging to Issachar bare no proportion to those of other tribes: they were only two hundred, when the others were thirty, forty, and even a hundred thousand men. But we must observe, that these two hundred were the heads and governors of that tribe; and “all the rest were at their command.” So let it be amongst us: let those who are foremost in rank, in learning, in wealth, lead the way, saying, “Come let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten:” and let all others unite with heart and hand, to seat Jesus on the throne of their hearts, and to glorify him as our Lord and our God.]

In applying to yourselves this subject, we would suggest a CAUTION or two:

1. Guard against yielding to any corrupt bias—

[In consulting times and circumstances, you will be in danger of being warped by your interests or passions. But you must watch and pray against them, and beg help from God that you may not be drawn aside by them.]

2. Bear in mind that God will judge you in the last day according to what he knows to have been your true motives—

[We cannot deceive him — — — and should be careful not to deceive ourselves.]

3. Beg of God to give you the “wisdom that is profitable to direct”—

[God has promised to give wisdom, even “sound wisdom and discretion,” to all who ask it of him^s. And let none be discouraged, as though a want of education or abilities incapacitated them for the due discharge of their duty; for the *heart*, and not the *head*, is the seat of *this* wisdom; and God has promised, that “the meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way.”]

^s Jam. i. 5.

CCCLXXXV.

DAVID'S THANKSGIVING AT THE CARRYING UP OF THE
ARK.

1 Chron. xvi. 7—15. *Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the Lord into the hand of Asaph and his brethren. Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth; O ye seed of Israel his servant, ye children of Jacob, his chosen ones. He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth. Be ye mindful always of his covenant.*

IF any one entertain a doubt whether “the ways of religion be ways of pleasantness and peace,” he needs only look to the history before us, and his doubts will vanish in an instant. It may be thought indeed, that, because the former attempt of David to carry up the ark was attended with sorrow, the general effect of God's service is not such as has been represented: but it must be remembered, that, on that occasion, though David meant well, he was criminally negligent respecting the mode of carrying his purposes into effect; and that God *on that account* had frowned upon him*. But when he was duly observant of God's commands respecting the ark, his soul was filled with unutterable joy, to which he gave vent in the Psalm before us.

This Psalm is taken out of several others. As far as the 21st verse, it occurs in the 105th Psalm; the greater part of the remainder is found in the 96th. It was given by David for the use of the Church, on occasion of carrying up the ark to Jerusalem. In the part which we have just read, we behold religion in its full exercise: we see exhibited in the brightest colours,

* 1 Chron. xiv. 10, 11. with xv. 13.

I. The general frame of mind that it requires—

We have not now to speak of moral actions, but rather of spiritual affections. We are to contemplate the Christian now in the dispositions of his mind and the exercises of his soul towards God. And here we observe,

1. That God should be the supreme object of his regard—

[The worldly man rises no higher than the world: “he minds” and savours nothing but what is earthly and carnal^b. But the spiritual man “minds the things of the Spirit,” and endeavours to set God, as it were, always before him. In the Psalm before us, there was evidently but one object in David’s mind. The world, and all that is in it, was forgotten; and God was “all in all.” Mark every sentence, or member of a sentence; and this will instantly appear. And should not this be the general frame and habit of *our* minds? Undoubtedly it should. We need not indeed be always occupied in religious exercises; for there are many other duties to be performed: but we should never for a moment lose the habit of holy and heavenly affections: a sense of God’s unbounded love and mercy should be wrought, as it were, into the very constitution and frame of our minds, so that we should no more cease to feel a supreme regard for him, than a worldly man does for the things of this world. In a word, his perfections, his word, and his works, should be ever so present to our mind, as it was to David on this occasion, or to Adam in paradise — — —]

This, whatever it may be called by ungodly men, is truly *rational* religion—

[A supreme delight in God is by many deemed enthusiasm: and the religion that consists in speculation, and theory, and form, is supposed to be exclusively entitled to the appellation of *rational*. But, if God be so infinitely glorious, that even angels themselves are in comparison of him no more than a glow-worm to the sun, he ought to be proportionably elevated in our hearts: and if the wonders he has wrought for us are beyond the powers of language to express, or of imagination to conceive, we should shew our sense of them by thinking of them, and speaking of them, and living continually under a sense of our obligations to him on account of them. Were the Jews required to testify their gratitude in this manner for the mercies vouchsafed to *them*? How much more should *we*

^b Rom. viii. 5. Phil. iii. 18, 19.

labour to express our gratitude for that infinitely greater work of redemption which he has wrought out for us by the blood of his only dear Son!

Again; if Christ our Saviour be now in heaven, should not our affections be there^c; and "our conversation be there" also^d? I say, that, provided we be not led to neglect our worldly duties, (which are in no respect incompatible with heavenly affections,) it is not possible to have our minds too much filled with love to God: on the contrary, the total surrender of all our faculties and powers to him is a "reasonable service^e."]]

But we shall see yet more clearly the excellency of religion, if we consider,

II. The particular duties it enjoins—

St. Paul gives us a short summary of duties, very similar to those that are enjoined in the text: "Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you^f." Thus David exhorts us,

1. To thank the Lord for all his past mercies—

[Were this exhortation addressed to the most miserable and the most abandoned of the human race, it would be highly reasonable, since the long-suffering which God has exercised towards him is itself a great salvation^g. But it is addressed to "the children of Israel," even "the chosen ones" of the Lord: and who can ever find cause for praise, if they do not? If they fill not the air with their hosannahs, the very "stones will cry out against them." Do but reflect on your unnumbered mercies, especially the gift of God's only dear Son *for* you, and the gift of salvation by him *to* you. Surely you should sing to him, yea, be singing his praises from day to day: you should be already anticipating the employment of heaven, and be singing day and night, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever and ever."]]

2. To pray to him for future blessings—

[The ark, as being the symbol of the Deity, was that before which the prayers of the high-priest were to be made, and from whence Jehovah was pleased to communicate his answers. Hence, in our text it is called "his strength." This ark was a type of Christ, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the

^c Col. iii. 1—4.

^d Phil. iii. 20.

^e Rom. xii. 1.

^f 1 Thess. v. 16—18.

^g 2 Pet. iii. 15.

Godhead bodily," and who is the fountain from whence all spiritual blessings must flow^h. To HIM therefore the Psalmist points, when he says, "Seek the Lord and *his strength*, seek his face continually." There is not any occasion whereon it is not our duty and our privilege to seek him. Nothing should be regarded as too small, nothing too great, to ask at his hands. The command is, "In *every* thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And the promise for our encouragement is, "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." O that we could go thus to God "continually," as children to their parent! Surely, however "wide we opened our mouths, he would fill them."]

3. To glory in him as our God and portion—

[In our text, David observes, "He is the Lord our God:" and elsewhere he says, "O Lord, thou art *my* God." This it is which elevates the soul to the highest state of bliss that it can enjoy on earth. The man of this world glories not in wealth, or honour, unless he can call them *his*. It is the property which we have in them that produces the feelings of joyous exultation. We should therefore strive to the uttermost to ascertain this point, that we are interested in the Saviour, and are authorized on good grounds to say, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his." As for all other objects of glorying, we should renounce them all, as incompatible with the Saviour's honour; and should determinately say with the Apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."]

4. To be always mindful of his covenant—

[The covenant here spoken of, is the covenant made with Abraham, and confirmed with an oath unto Isaac^l. In its literal sense it refers to the land of Canaan as the inheritance of Abraham's descendants: but in its mystical import it refers to all the spiritual seed of Abraham, who are made partakers of an infinitely nobler inheritance in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed the other was a mere shadow: and this is the substance. This was the covenant made with Christ before the foundation of the world^k; "a covenant ordered in all things and sure," an everlasting covenant that shall never be annulled. This covenant should be for ever in our minds: we should regard it as the one source of all the blessings we enjoy, and our great security for the continuance of them. This it

^h John i. 16. and xiv. 13, 14. with Eph. i. 22, 23.

^l ver. 16—18.

^k Gal. iii. 17. and Heb. vi. 13, 14, 17, 18. 2 Tim. i. 2.

is that will keep the mind firm and stable amidst all the difficulties and temptations that we have to encounter; since the execution and fulfilment of all its provisions depends on the faithfulness of an unchanging God¹. We should therefore contemplate this covenant, and trust in it, and plead it before God, and rejoice in an assured hope, that we shall in due time inherit the kingdom provided for us "before the foundation of the world^m."]

To IMPROVE this subject, we will add a few words,

1. Of reproof—

[How little is there of such religion as this in the midst of us! The generality know nothing of it by actual experience — — — and many, of whom we may hope that they are "God's chosen ones," scarcely ever rise higher than to a state of mourning for their sins, and of trust in God for his mercy. They are occupied so much about *themselves*, as almost to forget *their God*: that is, they do not contemplate as they ought, his unbounded excellencies, or delight themselves in him as their God and portion. O let not any of you rest in a state so unprofitable, and destitute of comfort as this! but seek to attain the full enjoyment of God in this world, as the best preparation for enjoying him in the world to come.]

2. Of encouragement—

[That which in our text is an exhortation, "Be mindful always of his covenant," is, in the Psalm from whence it is taken, a declaration respecting God, that "He hath remembered his covenant for everⁿ." Yes; he has remembered it, and ever will remember it; nor will he ever suffer one jot or tittle of it to fail. In that covenant he has made ample provision for all our necessities: so that, if we are ready to despond, (as if this elevated state of mind could never be attained, nor these duties ever be performed,) we need only look to that covenant, and all our fears will be dispelled. It is, as has been before observed, "ordered in all things, and sure;" and therefore the weakest shall have grace sufficient for him, and the most timid find security in the arms of an unchanging God.]

¹ Jer. xxxii. 40. Mal. iii. 6.

^m In treating this subject, care should be taken, as much as possible, to preserve the life and spirit of the text.

ⁿ Ps. cv. 8.

CCCLXXXVI.

DAVID'S ATTENTION TO HIS HOUSEHOLD.

1 Chron. xvi. 43. *And David returned to bless his house.*

IT is truly delightful to see the operation of religion on the soul of man; how it transforms him from a carnal and selfish creature, into a spiritual and heavenly being, who, like the sun in the firmament, steadily pursues his course, and shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day. Beautifully was it exemplified by David in the history before us; in illustration of which we shall notice,

I. The work in which he had been engaged—

This was, the bringing up of the ark from the house of Obed-edom to Jerusalem: and,

A glorious work it was—

[*In itself*, it was a work of vast importance. For many years had the ark lain in obscurity at Kirjath-jearim, without any application being made to it for instruction from God. But, when brought up to Jerusalem, it would be accessible at all times; and, in all difficult emergencies, the will of Jehovah might be learned from it. Indeed, the whole account respecting it shews us clearly, in what light it was viewed by the nation at large — — —]

As a typical act, its importance rises still higher in our estimation. It was undoubtedly typical of Christ's ascension into heaven; for in that view it is spoken of in a great variety of Psalms^a, and in that view the Psalms relating to it are quoted in the New Testament^b. Let other Psalms, from the 96th to 99th, be read as referring to both these events, and they will fully illustrate the importance of the work which David had just completed — — —]

And it had been performed in a manner most acceptable unto God—

[In its commencement, it was begun by consulting all the great men in the nation, who were stirred up to concur in it^c — — — In its progress, nothing was left to human invention, as before; but all was conducted with the strictest

^a Ps. xxiv. xlvii. lxviii. cxxxii.

^b Compare Ps. lxviii. 18. with Eph. iv. 8.

^c 1 Chron. xiii. 1—3.

attention to God's revealed will. Nor did David commit the service altogether to others: no; he himself attended the procession, and played and sang with all his might; yea, and danced also before the ark with such holy ecstasies, as to subject himself to the scorn and censure of his own wife; who being a stranger to those divine raptures, imputed them, not to pious fervour, but to indecent wantonness. But his joyous exultation was such as the occasion required, and such as, though condemned by Michal, was most pleasing unto God.]

Having seen the service to which he had gone forth, we proceed to notice,

II. The work to which he returned—

Though he might be well supposed at the conclusion of his service to need repose, yet he went home only to protract his labours in another way. He returned to bless his house; that is,

1. To obtain blessings for them by his prayers—

[He would not confine his religious exercises to public occasions, but went home to stir up in his family those blessed emotions with which his own soul was filled. He was anxious that all his wives, his children, and his servants should be partakers of his joy: and therefore he would unite with them in fervent supplication to the God of all grace, that they might themselves “know the Lord from the least even to the greatest of them,” and all experience the blessedness of his salvation.

Here we behold a bright example, which it behoves us all to follow. Family prayer is, alas! too often neglected, or at best but coldly performed, by many, who profess a high regard for public ordinances: but the true child of Abraham will “command his house and children after him to fear the Lord^d,” and will say with Joshua, “Whatsoever others may do, I and my house will serve the Lord^e.” If we have family wants, and family mercies, we should unite our prayers and our praises with our families, that God may be acknowledged as the one source from whence all good either has issued, or can be hoped for: and though we can easily imagine circumstances wherein such domestic services are impracticable, yet we cannot imagine any real piety to exist where such duties are wilfully neglected.]

2. To render himself a blessing to them by his conduct—

[It was promised to Abraham that he should not only be

^d Gen. xviii. 19.

^e Josh. xxiv. 15.

blessed himself, but be a blessing also to others: and this promise is in fact made to all the believing seed of Abraham. To make others happy was no small part of David's ambition. Hence he went to his house determined to contribute as far as possible to the edification and comfort of all connected with him. He would instruct the ignorant; and teach, not by precept only, but by example also. His determination was to "walk before his house in a perfect way"^f — — — He would not be proud, or imperious, or passionate, or fretful; but would regulate all his tempers and dispositions by the golden rule of doing as he would be done unto: and "the law of kindness would be ever in his lips."

How different is this from the conduct of many, who from the public ordinances, in which they profess to take delight, go down to their houses to make them wretched and miserable, rather than to bless them! O let the professors of religion look well to this: for, as a consistent Christian is a blessing wherever he goes, so an inconsistent Christian is a curse, and a stumbling-block to all around him.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. How highly we are privileged—

[The ark, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, is present in the midst of us. To him we may have access; and of him we may inquire continually: and every blessing which was typically derived from the symbol of his presence, shall be really and spiritually obtained by all who seek him. If then David and the whole kingdom of Israel felt such exalted joy in the possession of that which was a mere shadow, let us not be unmindful of our privilege in possessing the substance.]

2. In what way we should improve our privileges—

[Let us not only rejoice in them ourselves, but endeavour to communicate the benefit of them to others. Let all who see us, be the better for us; and all who stand in any relation to us be constrained to say, that "God is with us of a truth."]

^f Ps. ci. 2.

CCCLXXXVII.

GOD'S RELATION TO HIS PEOPLE.

1 Chron. xvii. 24. *The Lord of hosts is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel.*

A SENSE of God's kindness to us will invariably inspire us with a zeal for his glory. The more

deeply we feel our obligations to him, the more ready we shall be to speak good of his name, and the more desirous that he should be honoured by every child of man. It was David's happy lot to be eminently favoured of his God. He had been taken from the sheep-folds, to feed God's people Israel; and he had received a promise from God, that the kingdom should be perpetuated in his family to very distant generations. Overcome, as it were, with the contemplation of these stupendous mercies, he adores his God with the profoundest gratitude: "O Lord, there is none like thee, neither is there any God besides thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears^a." Then, looking for the establishment of God's blessed word in relation to himself and his descendants, he prays that God himself may be glorified by means of it: "Let it even be established, that thy name may be magnified for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God of Israel, even a God to Israel;" that is, "I have found thee a God to me: and I desire that thou mayest be known to Israel, and acknowledged by Israel, under that endearing character, to the latest generations."

Let us, for the illustrating of these words, consider,

I. The relation which God bears to his people—

He is here called "The God of Israel." But there seems, at first sight, to be nothing very peculiar in that, since he is "the God of the whole earth^b," yea, and of all his creatures, whether in heaven or hell; all being alike subject to him, and all equally under his control. The title here given to him must evidently import something of a more restricted nature, something that more immediately connects him with Israel as his peculiar charge. Its real signification is,

1. That he has chosen them out from amongst the world, which lieth in wickedness—

[This he did, when he called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees. Abraham was an idolater, in the midst of an

^a ver. 16—20.

^b Isai. liv. 5.

idolatrous family and nation. And God, of his own sovereign will and pleasure, chose him, and called him out from his family and nation, and "separated him for himself^c." And it is precisely thus that he calls all his people, whether those who were Abraham's lineal descendants, or those who are heirs of Abraham's faith. What was said to Israel in the wilderness, may be said to God's Israel to the very end of time: "Thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth^d." Nor, in one instance more than another, can any reason for this choice be assigned, but simply God's sovereign will and pleasure^e. In every instance, he is found of them that sought him not, and made known to them that inquired not after him^f."]

2. That he has given himself to them in a peculiar way—

[He gave himself to Abraham and the nation of Israel, as their God, in a more especial manner; so that he watched over them, and revealed himself to them, and exerted himself for them in a way that he never had done for any other people. The same he does for his chosen people at this time, only in a less visible manner. He takes them under his special protection: he orders every thing for them: and he makes himself known to them, as their Father and their Friend.]

3. That he avows that relation to them before the whole universe—

[This he did to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, calling himself their God: and when he would afterwards make himself known to their posterity in Egypt, he particularly commanded Moses to say to them, "The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, hath sent me unto you. This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations^g." And though the names of his people be not, nor can be, severally mentioned, he is as much their God, as ever he was Abraham's God. Wherever there are any persons who have been called out from the world to "seek after a better country, that is, an heavenly, he is not ashamed to be called their God^h."]]

But let us inquire more distinctly,

II. What, under that relation, we may expect at his hands—

^c Ps. iv. 3.

^d Deut. vii. 6.

^e Deut. vii. 7, 8.

^f Rom. x. 20.

^g Exod. iii. 15.

^h Heb. xi. 16.

"The God of Israel, is a God to Israel:" and whatever a God can do, that he will do for them. Hence, then, they may assuredly expect from him,

1. The care of his providence—

[See what he did for Israel of old. They needed a deliverer from their bondage: and he delivered them with a mighty hand, and a stretched-out arm. They needed guidance through the wilderness: and he himself went before them in the pillar and the cloud. They needed food: and he gave them bread from heaven to eat, and water from the stony rock for their refreshment. And will he not provide for us also whatsoever we stand in need of? "Is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear? or is his hand now shortened, that it cannot save?" No: he is the same gracious God as ever, and has pledged himself, that "they who seek his face, shall want no manner of thing that is good¹."]]

2. The communications of his grace—

[Without these, it were to little purpose that he were called our God: for it would be impossible for us ever to behold his face in peace. "Without him we can do nothing." We should still continue slaves to sin and Satan; and perish for ever amongst the enemies of God. But we need not fear. "He will give us both grace and glory^k." As our necessities increase, "he will give us more grace^l:" and however great our trials may be, he engages that "his grace shall be sufficient for us^m." Yea, so effectual shall be his communications, that, "through him strengthening us, we shall be able to do all thingsⁿ."]]

3. The manifestations of his love—

[Who that would approve himself as a father, would withhold from his child the tokens of his love? And will God, when he promises to be "a God unto us," be so unmindful of us, as never to lift up the light of his countenance upon us? No: He will give us "a Spirit of adoption, whereby we may cry, Abba, Father^o." He will give us also "the witness of the Spirit, as the earnest of our future inheritance^p." And to such a degree will he "shed abroad his love in our hearts^q," as to fill us with "a joy that is unspeakable and glorified^r."]]

4. The possession of his glory—

[This is particularly declared by our Lord himself, as inseparably connected with the relation we are now considering.

¹ Ps. xxxiv. 10.

^m 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^p Rom. viii. 16.

^k Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

ⁿ Phil. iv. 13.

^q Rom. viii. 5.

^l Jam. iv. 6.

^o Rom. viii. 15.

^r 1 Pet. i. 8.

When a doubt was entertained, whether there was ever to be a resurrection of the body, our Lord referred to the very name of God, as "the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob," as a demonstration of the point in question. For, if he was their God, he was the God of their whole persons, of their bodies as well as of their souls: and if their bodies should not be raised again, he would cease to be their God, as far as their bodies were concerned. But that relation should never cease: and, consequently, their bodies must be raised from the dead, in order that they might participate in the promised bliss*. No doubt, therefore, he will exalt to glory all his chosen people: for can he be a God to any in hell? *There* he will be only an avenging Judge. It is in heaven alone that he can execute all that *that* relation imports: we may be sure, therefore, that, as he is the God of his people, so "he will be their portion, and the lot of their inheritance" for evermore.]

Whilst, however, we contemplate our privileges in consequence of God's relation to us, we must bear in mind,

III. What, under that relation, he is entitled to expect from us—

Beyond a doubt, if he considers himself as bound to us, we also are bound to him: and if he is our God, we must be his people. The one is comprehended in the other: and, wherever one is mentioned, the other, if not absolutely mentioned, is always implied. Just before the text it is said, "Thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, Lord, becamest their God†." In the Epistle to the Hebrews, not only is the mutual relation specified, but it is stated precisely in our text; "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people". This, then, may God expect from us:

1. That we "be a people to him"—

[We are not to be satisfied with *calling ourselves* his: we must be really his. A servant considers himself, his time, his talents, his all, as at the disposal of his master: and from day to day he inquires how they can be improved for him. He never, for a moment, considers it sufficient to compliment his master with the name of master: but he waits upon him to receive his orders; and he departs from him only to execute

* Matt. xxii. 31, 32.

† ver. 22.

“ Heb. viii. 10.

them. Thus, then, we must "be a people to" the Lord. We must inquire what we can do for him. We must diligently learn what is the duty which he has appointed us to perform; and we must strenuously set ourselves to the performance of it — — —]

2. That we give ourselves to him, as he has given himself to us—

[We must do it *freely*, and *cheerfully*. There was no constraint on God's part in giving himself to us: he did it of his own mind and will. Thus must we surrender up ourselves to him. We must not wait till we are beset with the terrors of hell, and then give ourselves to him by compulsion. We should rather, from a view of his excellency, and from a sense of the unspeakable privilege of serving him, desire to be numbered amongst his favoured people^x. We must do it also *wholly* and *unreservedly*. Jehovah is not our God in part; doing some things for us, and not others: there is nothing that he has not done; for he has given his only dear Son to die for us: nor is there any thing he will not do; for "having given up his own Son for us, we may be assured he will much more do for us every thing else that we can need^y." On no consideration, therefore, should we withhold any thing from him. "Our whole body, soul, and spirit, should be sanctified to him^z." Nothing should be accounted too much to do or suffer for him: if the sacrifice even of life itself should be called for, it should be freely made; and we should rejoice that we are counted worthy to render him so honourable a service. We must also do it *unchangeably* and *for ever*. God never repents of what he has done for us^a: he tells us that he will not forsake his people, "because it hath pleased him to make us his people^b;" but that, "having loved us, he will love us to the end^c." And so should it be with us: "after having once put our hands to the plough, we should never look back again^d." We should "never faint or be weary in well-doing^e." We should give our ear to be bored in his service; and never relinquish it, till we are called to serve him in a better world^f.

This, I say, is what God may justly expect from us: and I conceive there is not a person upon earth so stupid and brutish, as not to see and acknowledge that it is "a reasonable service^g." If our expectations from God are greater than those of others, our services also should be greater. The ser-

^x Isai. lxiv. 9.

^a Rom. xi. 29.

^d Luke ix. 62.

^g Rom. xii. 1.

^y Rom. viii. 32.

^b 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^c Gal. vi. 9.

^z 1 Thess. v. 23.

^e John xiii. 1.

^f Exod. xxi. 6.

vices of others are no rule for *us*. The question that will be put to *us* will be, "What did ye *more* than others?"

Let me, then, conclude with two PROPOSALS :

1. That we, at this very hour, accept Jehovah as our God—

[He offers himself to us under this endearing character. He calls on every child of man to "lay hold on his covenant;" and in that very covenant he makes over himself to us as our God^h. Let us from this moment renounce all other gods, and say, "Thou, O God, shalt be my God for ever and ever^l." In accepting him, however, let us accept him for all the ends for which he gives himself to us. It is not to save us only that he gives himself to us, but to "be a God unto us;" to be the one source of all our joy; the one object of all our love; the one end of our very being. Let us then, open our hearts to receive him under this character. If there be any other that is more worthy of this place in our regards, or that can better fulfil the office committed to him, then will I consent that you shall take *him* for your God in preference to Jehovah: but if Jehovah alone can answer all the necessities of your souls, then, I say, accept him now as your God, and avouch him to be so in the presence of the whole universe^k.]

2. That we now consecrate ourselves to him as his people—

[This, as you have seen, must accompany the former: nor is there any man so blind, as not to see that the two are, and must be, inseparably connected. Let us, then, at this hour, "join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten^l." Unite with me now, my Brethren, in a solemn surrender of ourselves to God.

O Lord, our God, thine we are by every tie. To thee we owe our very being, for thou hast created us. To thee we owe our well-being, for thou hast upheld us every moment, and supplied us with all things needful for us. Above all, to thee we owe our hopes of happiness in a better world; for thou hast redeemed us by the blood of thine only dear Son. "We are not our own; we are bought with a price: and are therefore bound in every view to glorify thee with our bodies and our spirits, which are thine^m." We acknowledge with shame that "other lords besides thee have had dominion over us: but by thee will we henceforth make mention of thy name,

^h Jer. xi. 2—4.

^l Ps. xlviii. 14.

^k Deut. xxvi. 17, 18.

^l Jer. l. 5.

^m 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

even of thine only^a." Behold, O Lord, we now dedicate to thee all that we are, and all that we have. We know it to be our duty: we believe it to be our privilege: we are assured that it is our highest honour and happiness. Make us sincere in this, we pray thee: and "keep it for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of our hearts^o!" Oh, let us never go back from thee, nor ever alienate from thee any portion of those regards which are due to thee alone. Let the measure of our expectations from thee be the measure of our dedication to thee: and, as we hope that thou wilt be fully and for ever ours, so enable us to be fully and for ever thine!

Beloved Brethren, do you truly add to this your hearty "Amen?" The Lord grant you may! and may what we have now done be accepted of our God, and be for ever ratified in heaven! Amen, and Amen!]

^a Isai. xxvi. 13.

^o 1 Chron. xxix. 18.

^p At the Lord's table, we all do what is here done. "*Here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee.*"

CCCLXXXVIII.

SOLOMON A TYPE OF CHRIST.

1 Chron. xxii. 9, 10. *Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days. He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever.*

IF God have any great work to do, he will raise up fit instruments for himself, and qualify them for executing his will. Nor will he make use of such persons only as, of their own minds, covet the employment, but oftentimes such as are either averse to it, or unconcerned about it. Has he ordained to bring his people out of Egypt, or to gather to himself a people from the Gentile world? He raises up a Moses, or converts a Paul, that, as his agents, they may accomplish his gracious purpose. Thus when David was solicitous to build an house for God, and had made great preparations for it, God forbade him

to carry into effect his designs; and conferred that honour on Solomon, his son. While we adore this exercise of his sovereign will, we are led to contemplate a mystery veiled under this dispensation, and to trace the resemblance which was by this means produced between Solomon, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Though the words of the text in their literal sense relate to Solomon, yet they have undoubtedly a further reference to Christ; of whom Solomon was a type,

I. In his dearness to God—

Solomon was eminently favoured of the divine Being—

[He was a subject of prophecy before he was born; and was called “Jedidiah,” by God’s special appointment, in token of the peculiar love which God bore towards him^a. His mental endowments were such as never had before been possessed by fallen man. His knowledge of natural philosophy was wonderfully extensive^b; and his qualifications for administering the affairs of his kingdom were so perfect, as to be the envy, and admiration, of all who knew him^c. He was honoured with repeated visions of the Almighty, and with most signal evidences of divine acceptance^d. Throughout his life did God regard him as a beloved child; nor were the judgments inflicted on him toward the close of life for his awful declensions, to be considered in any other light than as paternal chastisements: for though we are not expressly told that he ever was recovered from his lewdness and idolatries, we cannot but hope that he became a real penitent, and died, as once he had lived, “beloved of the Lord.”^e]

But Jesus was, infinitely beyond all others, the beloved of the Father—

[Jesus had been a subject of prophecy, not for a few years merely, but from the foundation of the world. The name, Emmanuel, was given him many hundred years before he became incarnate; and He was called Jesus, by the angel, before his conception in the womb^f. Thrice, by an audible

^a 2 Sam. xii. 24, 25.

^b 1 Kings iii. 12. and iv. 29—34.

^c 1 Kings iii. 16—28.

^d 1 Kings ix. 2.

^e It is most probable that the book of Ecclesiastes was written in consequence of his restoration to the divine favour.

^f Isai. vii. 14. Matt. i. 21.

voice from heaven did God proclaim him his "beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." As for the endowments of his mind, he not only had the spirit of wisdom and understanding resting upon him^a, but all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hid in him^b, so that "he spake as never man spake." So perfectly was he qualified for every part of his regal office, that "Righteousness was the very girdle of his loins," with which he was always girt for the discharge of his duty^c. And it is worthy of particular notice, that the very words of the text, which confessedly point out Solomon as a son of God, are quoted, by an inspired Apostle, as referring to Christ, and as declaring his superiority to all both in heaven and earth^d. While therefore, with the Apostle, we consider Solomon as a type of Christ, we learn to entertain the most exalted thoughts of Christ, as "the brightness of his Father's glory."]

We may observe a further resemblance of Solomon to Jesus,

II. In the office assigned him—

It was to Solomon that God assigned the honour of building an house for his name—

[David had shed much blood in the course of the many wars in which he had been engaged; and, though he had done this both by the direction and assistance of God himself, yet it unfitted him in God's estimation, for building the temple. But Solomon, whose very name imported *Peace*, and who was to have rest on every side, was more fit to represent "the Prince of Peace," and more at leisure to execute so great a work. Him therefore did God prefer: nor could any man prove himself more worthy of the employment. He entered on his work with zeal and piety; and, having finished the noblest edifice that ever the world beheld, and supplied it with most costly furniture in every part, he consecrated it in a solemn and public manner to Jehovah.]

But there is a far more glorious house which Christ alone erects—

[The temple of Solomon was only a shadow of another temple, the Church of God, in which God dwells, not by any visible symbol of his presence, but by his quickening, comforting, and sanctifying Spirit. Of this temple we ourselves are, as it were, the stones, hewn out by the Lord himself; fitted by him for the place we are designed to occupy; and so disposed by him, that "all the building fitly framed together

^a Isai. xi. 1—3.

^b Col. ii. 3.

^c Isai. xi. 5.

^d Comp. 1 Chron. xvii. 13. with Heb. i. 5.

may grow unto an holy temple in 'the Lord¹.' Moreover, Christ is declared, both by Prophets and Apostles, to be the founder and finisher of his house^m. And how infinitely does it exceed, both in beauty and magnificence, the structure by which it was typified! *That* was composed, like other buildings, of earthly and perishable materials; *this* is composed of lively stones, built upon a living Foundation-stone, and cemented, in every part, by the Spirit of the living Godⁿ: *That* was enriched with gold and silver; but *this* with all the gifts and graces of the Spirit, yea, with the "unsearchable riches of Christ" himself.]

Perhaps in nothing was Solomon a more glorious type of Christ than,

III. In the peacefulness and perpetuity of his kingdom—

Very remarkable were the peace and prosperity of Solomon's reign—

[God had either put down all his enemies, or disposed their hearts to peace and amity; so that, till Solomon had departed from the Lord, and thereby provoked his displeasure, his kingdom enjoyed uninterrupted tranquillity. And though, for his transgressions, the ten tribes were rent from his immediate successor, and ever afterwards continued separate, yet the kingdom of Judah was transmitted to his posterity, and preserved in his family, as long as the kingly government itself existed.]

This however was a very faint image of what exists in the kingdom of Christ—

[It is true, that the Church has never yet enjoyed much *outward* peace: for though it has often been free from those bloody persecutions, with which it has at some times been harassed, yet it has never ceased for one moment to be an object of reproach, and abhorrence, amidst an ungodly world. Still, however, may we justly speak of the peacefulness of Christ's kingdom, since all his subjects have peace with God, and in their own consciences, even a peace that passeth all understanding^o. And there is a time coming, when the enmity of the carnal heart shall be slain; and all mankind, brought into one blessed family, shall live in harmony with each other, "the wolf lying down with the lamb, and the lion eating straw with the ox; there shall be none to hurt, or destroy, in all

¹ Eph. ii. 21.

^m Zech. iv. 9. and vi. 12, 13. with Heb. iii. 3, 6.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5. ^o Isai. liv. 13. Ps. lxxii. 7.

God's holy mountain^p." Of this kingdom too there shall be no end: for though the present mode of administering it shall be changed^q, (there being no more occasion for a Mediator, when all the saints shall be glorified,) yet shall he, who now sits upon the throne of David, reign over Israel for ever and ever^r.]

REFLECTIONS—

1. How great and glorious a person must Christ be!

[We justly admire Solomon on account of the singular honour which God put upon him: but what were the endowments of his mind, what the grandeur of his works, or what the stability of his kingdom, when compared with the excellencies of the King of Zion? Surely they were but as darkness that renders Emmanuel's light more visible. Let us then fix our eyes on our adorable Saviour; and learn from the faint glimmering of the brightest star, to admire the infinitely brighter glories of the Sun of Righteousness.]

2. How happy are the subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom!

[The Queen of Sheba, filled with wonder at what she saw and heard in the court of Solomon, exclaimed, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, who stand continually before thee, and hear thy wisdom!" But how incomparably happier must they be, who stand in the presence of Jesus, and hear his voice; and not only behold, but participate, his glory! Believer, know thy privileges, and learn to estimate them aright. And let all earthly glory be despised by thee as not worth a thought, in comparison of that which thou already possessest, and shalt possess, when all the kingdoms of this world have vanished away.]

3. How inexcusable are they who neglect the Saviour!

[Our Lord warned his hearers, that the Queen of the South would rise up in judgment against them, and condemn them, because she went from the very ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; whereas they, when they had One greater than Solomon in the midst of them, despised and rejected him^t. And will she not in a still greater degree condemn *us*, who, even while we profess ourselves the followers of Christ, shew no love to his person, no admiration of his

^p Ps. lxxii. 10, 11. Isai. xi. 6—9.

^q 1 Cor. xv. 28.

^r 1 Kings x. 8.

^t Luke i. 32, 33. Isai. ix. 7.

[†] Matt. xii. 42.

glory, no zeal for his honour? Shall not we perish under a most aggravated load of guilt, when, under the meridian light of the Gospel, we prefer darkness to light, and the service of sin to the service of our Lord? May God the Spirit come down to convince us of our sin, and effectually subdue us to the obedience of faith!]

CCCLXXXIX.

SEEKING AFTER GOD.

1 Chron. xxii. 19. *Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God.*

THERE are many subjects, which, whilst in themselves they are plain and simple, derive much importance from the occasions on which they arise, or the circumstances with which they are attended. The duty of "seeking after God" is inculcated in the Holy Scriptures, times without number: and the insisting upon it, though interesting and necessary in its place, may seem to promise little that is new, or beyond the bounds of common pastoral instruction. But, if the occasion on which these words were uttered be taken into our consideration, they will be found to possess a very peculiar interest. Let us, then, notice,

I. The occasion on which this injunction was given—

[David was now at an advanced period of life; and was deeply concerned to improve his power and influence, for the honour of God and the welfare of his people. Time was when both he and all his people were in a very different condition from that which they enjoyed at this time; *he* being persecuted and driven by Saul, "as a partridge upon the mountains;" and *they* being overrun and conquered by the Philistine armies^a. But now the whole kingdom being consolidated and enlarged, and all their enemies being subdued, he was desirous of building a temple to the Lord. That honour, however, having been denied to him, and transferred to his son, he in this chapter exhorts his son to prosecute the work with becoming zeal; and, because his son was yet "young and tender," he urges all the princes of the realm to aid him to the

^a 1 Sam. xxxi. 7.

utmost of their power. He mentions what preparations he had made for the work, having amassed in gold and silver, *at the lowest computation*, eighteen millions of our money, besides materials of wood and stone and brass and iron to an immense extent; and at the same time having engaged the most skilful artificers in every department; so that nothing remained, but that they should commence the work the very instant that his son should succeed to the throne^b — — — But, as they could not hope for the divine blessing unless they should consecrate themselves in the first instance to God, he entreats them *now*, without delay, to “set their heart and their soul to seek the Lord their God.”

And have not *we* a temple to build; a temple that shall be “exceeding magnificent,” not only “of fame and glory throughout all countries,” but comprehending within its walls every nation upon earth? — — — And are not glorious preparations made, such as never since the establishment of Christ’s kingdom in the world were seen before? Societies without number are on foot amongst every body of Christians, for the diffusion of light and knowledge, both amongst Jews and Gentiles, in every quarter of the globe — — — Who sees not how greatly the face of things is altered, even within a very few years, in the Christian world? Religion, instead of being frowned upon to the extent it once was, is honoured; and, instead of being driven into a corner, is spread over the face of Christendom, with a rapidity which but a few years ago could not have been anticipated. And, as “Tyrians and Zidonians” contributed to David “their cedars and their workmen,” so now, Hindoos and Heathens are co-operating with us in the good work; and, to change the metaphor, “the fields are already white unto the harvest.” “*Now*,” then, is the time for all to “seek the Lord.” As far as our *personal* interests are concerned, this duty is equally seasonable at all times: but *for the interests of God’s Church* the present season is peculiarly propitious; because an union of all Israel, both of “princes” and of people, is in progress; and by such combined efforts we may hope to advance this great and blessed work.]

With a special view to these things, we proceed to notice,

II. The injunction itself—

Two things are here pointed out:

1. What is to be the great object of our life—

^b Cite ver. 1—5, 14—16.

[We must "seek the Lord our God." We must seek *his favour*; for without that we can do nothing, to any good purpose. But let us seek it in his appointed way, by faith in his dear Son — — — "Christ is the only way to the Father, nor can any come acceptably to God, but by him, and through him^c."

We must seek *his direction* also, without which we are sure to err. The Israelites in the wilderness did not need the guidance of the pillar and the cloud more than we. Let us, therefore, watch its motions; and beg of God that we may have at all times that promise fulfilled to us, "The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way^d."

His glory, too, we must seek. We must on no account be acting with a view to our own honour or interest, but simply and entirely to the honour of our God. And this principle we must carry into the minutest actions of our lives: "Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we must do all to the glory of God^e."

In a word, we must seek in all things *His final approbation*. To be applauded of men will be of little avail to us, if in the last judgment we be condemned by our God. We must proceed in the way of duty, whatever man may either say or do: and to obtain the plaudit of our God, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" must satisfy us, whatever we may sacrifice for his sake, or whatever we may suffer.]

2. In what way we are to prosecute it—

[We are not to engage in the Lord's work with a stupid indifference; but to embark in it, even as David did, with "our whole heart and our whole soul^f." It is thus that God interests himself for his people: and shall we do less for him, than he for us? The work which we have to do is "our very life^g:" and on the manner of prosecuting it depends our whole success. We must "*set* our heart and our soul to it^h;" and, like Joshua, determine, that, though all other people should dissent from us, "we will serve the Lord" — — — In this we may learn even from the wicked. *They*, many of them at least, have "their heart fully set in them to do evil," and they do it "with both hands earnestlyⁱ:" and *we*, also, must "with full purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord^k," and "be steadfast and immovable, and always abounding in the work he has assigned us^l."]

^c John xiv. 6.

^d Ps. xxv. 9. See also Isai. xxx. 21.

^e 1 Cor. x. 31.

^f Jer. xxxii. 41.

^g Deut. xi. 18. and xxxii. 46, 47.

^h Deut. iv. 29.

ⁱ Eccl. viii. 11. and Mic. vii. 3.

^k Acts xi. 23.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 58.

And now,

1. Avail yourselves of the opportunities afforded you for public usefulness—

[Verily, these are days in which it is an inestimable privilege to live. The facilities afforded for the exercise of piety and benevolence are altogether unprecedented. The poorest, as well as the rich, may contribute to the building of God's spiritual temple, and by their prayers may prevail to an unknown extent. And our encouragement is great. There is already a dawn of a very glorious day; and we see the drops that precede an abundant shower. Spread then your sails, now that the wind is favourable: and in whatever department of God's work you are employed, set your heart to it, and "do it with all your might."]

2. Begin with a surrender of your whole souls to God—

[All acceptable service to God must begin within our own bosoms. If our religion begin not at home, we shall be only like the builders of Noah's ark, who prepared for others a deliverance of which themselves did not partake. The Macedonians were commended by St. Paul especially for this, that whilst they exercised benevolence towards others with unrivalled zeal, "they first gave their own selves to the Lord^m." This is what we also must do: and this we shall do, if our hearts be right with God: we shall, each for himself, and all in concert, determine to "go and seek speedily the Lord of hosts:" and, when we exhort others to that good work, we shall, "every one of us, be forward to say, I will go alsoⁿ."]

^m 2 Cor. viii. 3—5.

ⁿ Zech. viii. 20—22.

CCCXC.

DAVID'S ADVICE TO SOLOMON.

- .1 Chron. xxviii. 9. *And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.*

WHATEVER may have been their own conduct through life, it is the wish of most men in a dying hour, that their children should walk in the ways of

probity and honour. But men of piety have higher views: they wish their children not merely to pass through this world with credit, but to obtain happiness beyond the grave. The advice of David in the words before us, is precisely such as every religious parent would wish to give to his surviving family. Let us observe,

I. The advice here given—

The occasion was most solemn. David had desired to build a temple for the Lord, but was forbidden; and was directed to devolve that office on his son Solomon. All the princes and great men of the nation were convened to assist at the solemnity: and in the presence of them all did David direct his son,

1. Whom to seek—

[The terms here used have doubtless a peculiar force. David does not say to his son, “Know thou the God of *Israel*,” but “Know thou the God of *thy father*,” by which expression he evidently called the attention of Solomon to the character of Jehovah as exemplified in all his dealings towards *him*: it is as though he had said, “Know thou that *sovereign* God, who chose me above all to rule his people Israel — — — Know that *almighty* God who, in all my dangers from Saul or other enemies, has preserved me to the present hour — — — Know that *merciful* God who forgave me all my great transgressions in the matter of Uriah — — — and that *faithful* God who has fulfilled to me all his great and precious promises, in raising up thee to sit on my throne, and to build a temple to the Lord” — — —

“*Know*” this God: study his character as displayed in all his conduct towards me: acquaint thyself with him in the most intimate and endearing manner: and seek him as thy friend, thy portion, thine eternal great reward! But remember that it is in Christ only that this character of God can be fully seen — — — Seek then to know God as reconciled to you in the Son of his love; and let “this God be your God for ever and ever.”]

2. How to serve him—

[Integrity of heart is indispensable in all who would serve their God aright. *Absolute* perfection is not to be expected by fallen man: but that measure of perfection which consists in a total freedom from all guile, not only may, but must,

be attained. To be "Israelites indeed," we must be "without guile." There must be no lust, which we desire to retain; no duty, from which we draw back; no sacrifice which we are averse to make: the will of God, even his whole will, without any limitation or exception, must be that to which we aim to be conformed — — — And in our labours to fulfil our duty, we must not be constrained by slavish fear, but by filial love. We must feel the service of our God to be perfect freedom; and find all our delight in it, like the angels, who "do his will, hearkening to the voice of his word" — — — As we are to love our God, so also are we to serve him, "with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength."]

The importance of this charge is strongly marked in,

II. The considerations with which it is enforced—

Two arguments are here used to impress the more deeply on Solomon's mind the foregoing exhortation. They are briefly these;

1. That God is privy to our inmost thoughts—

[If God could judge only by the outward appearance, we might with less danger be inattentive to our hearts: but the heart of man is as visible to him as the sacrifices when flayed and divided asunder were to the priests of old^a. Not the thoughts only, but "the imaginations of the thoughts," the very first risings of them before they are formed into a distinct apprehension of the mind, are all seen and marked by Him, so as to ascertain with precision their nature and quality; and to make them infallible grounds of condemnation or acquittal in the day of judgment. Not actions only, but "the spirits of men are weighed by him," so as to discern how much there is of good or evil in every inclination, affection, appetite, and motion of the soul.

What a reason is this for attending to the frame of our minds in the service of our God! That, and that only which is according to his word, will be accepted by him: whatever there is of formality, or hypocrisy, or of any evil principle, will all be separated as chaff from the wheat, to be consumed in the fire, when the wheat is treasured up in his garner. Alas! how little that is truly good, will be found even in the best of men! Consider this, all ye who would find acceptance with God; and endeavour to approve yourselves to Him, "who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins."]

^a Heb. iv. 13. τετραηλισμένα.

2. That he will deal with us according as we conduct ourselves towards him—

[It is grievous that men should explain away the plainest declarations of God, in order to accommodate them to human systems. There is nothing clearer in all the inspired volume, than that "God will be found of them that seek him, and cast off those who forsake him." We appeal to the experience of all who are in the slightest degree acquainted with vital godliness. "Did God ever say to any man, Seek my face in vain?" — — — On the other hand, Who ever turned back from him, without suffering loss in his soul? Who has not found that the Spirit of God may be grieved and provoked to withdraw his gracious communications? Most assuredly he will not always strive with man, but will give us up to our own hearts' lusts, if we wilfully harbour those dispositions or affections which are hateful in his sight. Moreover, in the eternal world, he will recompense every man exactly according to his works; adjudging to his diligent servants a reward proportioned to their diligence in improving their talents, and to the disobedient servants a punishment proportioned to their guilt.

Who can reflect on this, and not feel the force of the advice given in our text? Our happiness both in time and in eternity depends on our present diligence and fidelity. Let us therefore implore help from God, that we may so devote ourselves to him now, as to be approved by him in the day of judgment.]

ADDRESS—

1. To parents—

[You see in David, what should be your chief desire in behalf of your children. We say not that you should be indifferent about their worldly advancement; for that also is important in its place: but your great concern should be to have them truly pious and devoted to God. Labour then, by every possible means, to attain this point. Call them to you, and address them each by name with all tenderness and fidelity; remembering that you yourselves must answer unto God for the influence with which he has invested you for their good; and that, if they perish through your neglect, their blood will be required at your hands.]

2. To those who are coming forth into life—

[Such advice as that which is given in our text, you are ready to judge premature, or at least to think you have good reason for delaying your attention to it. But are you young, and moving in an elevated sphere, and engaging in concerns of vast importance? So was Solomon: yet were these no reasons for David to withhold the advice, or with Solomon to reject

it. Remember, it is for eternity, and not for time only, that you should live; and, if you disregard the admonitions of your parents, they who now so long for your welfare, will be swift witnesses against you at the day of judgment.]

3. To all who are here present—

[It is not unbecoming a minister of Christ to regard his flock with parental solicitude, or to address them in the language of our text. Let me then address each of you, as it were, in the presence of the whole collective body, and urge you to seek after God with your whole hearts. Rest not in a formal routine of duties, or in a partial conformity to his revealed will: but see that your "hearts are right with him;" and never rest till you have "the witness of his Spirit," and "the testimony of your own conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity you have your conversation in the world." Such a state of mind is most desirable for every one of us; and it is the best preparative, no less for the duties of this life, than for the enjoyments of the life to come.]

CCCXCI.

DAVID'S PREPARATION FOR THE TEMPLE.

1 Chron. xxix. 2. *Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God.*

THERE is no end to the benefits which we may derive from Scripture history. What if our situation and circumstances be different from those which are there adverted to? the advantage to be received from the relation of them is not a whit the less: on the contrary, it often happens, that the voice of God in them is on that very account the more powerful. Take, for instance, the example before us. David, of his own mind, desired to build a temple for the Lord: and he was forbidden to do it: yet "with all his might he prepared for it;" though it was never to be done till he should be removed to a better world. It may be said, and with truth, that we are not, nor are at all likely to be, in circumstances like his: yet will his example be found of very peculiar use, whilst I set before you,

I. The zeal he manifested for the building of a *material* temple to the Lord—

Though forbidden to execute his wishes, he was not forbidden to prepare for the execution of them by his son and successor on the throne of Israel. He, therefore, availed himself of the wealth and influence which God had given him, himself to contribute, out of his own personal property, above eighteen millions of our money; and to promote a similar liberality amongst his subjects, who contributed above thirty millions. The amount of both together was fifty millions of pounds. Now, it may be asked, On what principle did he proceed? And why should he so strip both himself and his people of their possessions, for the purpose of raising a structure to the Lord? I answer, he did it,

1. To honour God—

[David had built for himself a noble palace: and he could not endure to live in a house of cedar himself, whilst the ark, which was the symbol of the divine presence, “dwelt between curtains.” True, no earthly house could be a fit habitation for Him who filleth heaven and earth: but still it was more seemly that there should be for God a fixed abode: and by making it “exceeding magnificent,” it would become an object of admiration to all the surrounding nations. It would also fill with reverence all his own people; and thus be the means of honouring God among them, and of exalting in their esteem its Divine Inhabitant. And was not this an object worthy to be promoted, whatever might be the trouble, or whatever the expense?]

2. To bring down a blessing upon his whole land—

[Greatly would it facilitate the access of all the people to their God, especially when they should come up annually, at the three appointed seasons, to worship there. And much would they see that would afford them abundant edification. Indeed, the candlesticks and lavers that were used in the tabernacle were multiplied ten-fold in the temple: and the accommodations for the worshippers would be enlarged, perhaps an hundred-fold. Whilst, therefore, the very sight of that magnificent structure would fill them with reverential awe, they would derive exceeding great comfort and encouragement from the increased facilities of social worship. And, beyond a doubt, in proportion as they delighted in drawing nigh to God, God would delight in drawing nigh to them;

and in proportion as they sought him, he would be found of them, and pour out his benefits upon them.

And could a monarch improve his wealth and influence better than in such a work? No, surely: no labour, however great, nor any sacrifice, however costly, would be ill bestowed in the advancement of so blessed and desirable an end. Millions of gold and silver were well appropriated to a cause like this.]

But greater far is,

II. The zeal that becomes us in raising a *spiritual* temple in his name—

In reference to this work, no prohibition is issued to any living soul; but, on the contrary, a commandment is given to all. And infinitely more does it deserve our utmost exertions: we all are called to aid in raising this nobler edifice—

[Yes, a nobler edifice it is indeed!

Its foundation is more solid. The material temple, doubtless, was built on a foundation well fitted for its support. But Jesus Christ is, "the foundation laid in Zion:" on him must we raise the edifice^a; or rather "on the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone^b."

Its materials are more precious. Doubtless of timber and stone there was the most careful selection that could be made. But our temple consists of "living stones^c," every one of them penetrated by the Spirit of God, and animated with the very life that is in Christ Jesus^d.

Its architect is more honourable. Bezaliel and Aholiab are immortalized by their unrivalled skill. But of the Temple in which our assistance is required, it must be said, "Its Builder and Maker is God^e." There is not a stone belonging to it which has not been hewn out of the quarry by God himself, and formed and fashioned by Him who built the universe: so true is that declaration of the Apostle, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works^f."

Far nobler sacrifices, too, are offered in it. All the cattle upon a thousand hills were not worthy to be compared with the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit. "With every such offering God is well pleased:" and the temple itself is infinitely more raised in his esteem, on account of the offerings presented there^g. Not one is ever inflamed with his heavenly

^a Isai. xxviii. 16.

^b Eph. ii. 20.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

^d Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 3, 4.

^e Heb. xi. 10.

^f Eph. ii. 10.

^g Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.

fire, but the odours of it ascend up before him with acceptance, and are "well pleasing to him through Jesus Christ^h."

The manifestations of God in it are also more bright. True, in the material temple, God so filled it, that the priests could no longer stop to minister there^l. But in his spiritual temple he dwells, not by a bright cloud, the symbol of his presence, but by his own immediate presence; making it "his habitation through the Spirit^k," and displaying to the view of every faithful worshipper "all the glory of the Godhead in the face of Jesus Christ^l."

The whole economy of it, also, is more lasting. The material temple has been so entirely destroyed, that not even its site can now be accurately ascertained. But the spiritual Temple shall endure for ever, as we are told by the beloved Apostle: "I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and he will be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away^m." The Romans utterly subverted the one: but not all the power and policy of hell shall ever prevail against the other.]

What zeal, then, can be too great, in promoting such a work as this?

[Did David "prepare with all his might for the house which he was forbidden to construct?" Surely *we* should spare no labour and no cost in advancing the work to which we are called. We should devote to it both our persons and our property: our persons doubtless *in the first instance*ⁿ; for without *that* sacrifice, all the wealth of kingdoms would be a vain and empty, yea, a hateful and detestable offering^o: but *with that*, we must present also our gold and our silver, to the utmost extent of our power^p. It cannot be that men should go forth to preach the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles, all over the world, at their own cost: nor can the Holy Scriptures be translated into all languages, and be dispersed over all countries, without great and liberal contributions. But if David and his subjects gave so richly of their substance to raise a temple of wood and stone, and even adored God for giving them the inclination and ability to contribute^q, much more should we

^h Ps. li. 17.

^l 1 Kings viii. 10, 11.

^k Eph. ii. 22.

^l 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^m Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

ⁿ 2 Cor. viii. 5.

^o Isai. lxvi. 3. Rom. xii. 1.

^p ver. 13, 14.

^q 2 Cor. viii. 3, 4. If there were only 12,500*l.* raised, as for the London Society, it would occupy the space of 4000 years! How little do *we*, for the souls of God's Ancient People, in comparison of David!

be willing to give all that we can *spare*—I had almost said, all that we *possess*, for the advancing of God's kingdom over the face of the whole earth.

Shall it be thought that our present contributions are large? Suppose them to be fifty thousand a year; there will be a lapse of *a thousand years before we have collected what David and his servants gave, before so much as a single stone was laid.*

Shall it be said, as it often is, in reference to the Millennium, "It will not take place in our day?" Be it so, if you please: yet learn from David, that that consideration, even if it were certain, should not induce you in the least degree to relax your exertions. You should still "prepare for it with all your might," and help it forward to the utmost of your power———

If any one say, "I can do nothing towards that great work;" let him know, that he has at least one Temple to prepare, even his own soul, which must, ere it can be happy, become "a Temple of the living God^r:" *that* you must prepare, by penitence and faith, to be the habitation of Almighty God^s. But take care that "Christ be the foundation on which you build; for there neither is, nor can be, any other^t." Take care, also, what your superstructure is: "If it be hay, straw, stubble, it will be burnt up. It must be of gold, and silver, and precious stones," in order to be approved of the Lord^u. Take care, also, not to retain in your bosom any evil disposition. God could not endure that his temple of old should be defiled; much less will he suffer with impunity any lusts to be harboured in the soul of man: "If any man defile the Temple of God, him shall God destroy: for the Temple of God is holy: which Temple ye are^v." I call on every one of you, then, to be "workers together with God" in this sacred cause^v: and, "whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with all your might^w."]]

^r 1 Cor. iii. 16. and vi. 19.

^s 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^t 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^u 1 Cor. iii. 12—15.

^v John ii. 13—17. 1 Cor. iii. 17.

^w 2 Cor. vi. 1.

^x Eccl. ix. 10.

CCCXCII.

SAINTS STRANGERS ON EARTH.

1 Chron. xxix. 15. *We are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding,*

THE more truly pious we are, the more shall we be clothed with humility. On no occasion had David evinced more exalted piety, than in his preparations for the building and furnishing the temple, which he was not permitted in his lifetime to erect. "He had prepared for it with all his might," "because he had set his affection to the house of his God^a." He contributed to the amount of about eighteen millions of money: and his people also shewed a similar liberality, according to their power. And what reflections did these efforts generate in his mind? Was he filled with self-complacency? or did he assume any merit to himself? No: he gave to God the glory of all that had been done, acknowledging that the power to do it was the effect of his bounty, and the disposition to do it the fruit of his grace. A more sublime ascription of praise will scarcely be found in all the Book of God, than that which he uttered on this occasion. He bore in mind, that, as his continuance here was but of short duration, it became him to exert himself with all possible zeal, whilst any opportunity to serve God remained. The expressions which he made use of in my text will lead me to shew you,

I. The state of man as it is here represented—

Man is but "a stranger and sojourner" upon earth—

[This world is not our home. If we are saints indeed, we have been born from above: we are children of a heavenly Father: we are of "the family of which Christ is the head," and the glorified saints and angels are the members: and heaven itself is the inheritance to which we are begotten^b. This world is but a wilderness, through which we are passing to our Father's house. We are mere pilgrims here. The people amongst whom we sojourn are governed by different laws, and speak a different language, and are strangers to us, even as we are to them. Our communion with them is such as necessity alone requires. Wherever we are, we are only like travellers in an inn. Our stay is of uncertain duration. If our accommodations be good, we are thankful for them; but

^a ver. 2, 3.

^b 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

not much elated, because we regard them as merely momentary, and have our minds intent on far higher joys to come. On the other hand, if our accommodations be of a less comfortable nature, we feel no great disappointment. We consider that as incident to our state as travellers; and are consoled with the thought, that in due season we shall reach our home, where there is fulness of joy for evermore.

This has been the state of all the saints, from the beginning: the patriarchs "confessed it to be theirs;" and gloried in the thought that they were "seeking a better country," which they should inhabit for ever^c.]

This representation is confirmed by actual experience—

[“Our days on earth are but as a shadow, and there is none abiding.” Behold the shadow of a cloud passing over the fields; how rapidly does it proceed! and how speedily does it vanish, not leaving the slightest trace of it behind! Thus generations pass away, and “the places where they have lived know them no more.” “No one has found here any continuing city.” The antediluvians lived for eight or nine hundred years; yet they died at last. How short, then, is our continuance, now that the term of life is reduced to seventy or eighty years! Let the oldest of us look back: our life seems to have been but “a mere span:” it has “declined as a shadow^d,” it has come to an end, “as a tale that is told^e,” it has been “as a vapour, that appeareth for a moment, and then vanisheth away^f.” Thus it has been with all, however *great*, or however *good*. The kings of the earth, that have made all the world to stand in awe of them, have passed away; yea, and their very empires have vanished with them. Where are now the Assyrian, Babylonish, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires? They have been swallowed up, as it were, and lost; together with the monarchs by whom they were established. In like manner, “the Prophets and Apostles, where are they?” they filled but an appointed time, and then were taken to their eternal rest. But, in truth, the very place where we are assembled gives us a convincing evidence, that, whether by choice or not, the same character pertains to every one of us; we are but pilgrims upon earth, hastening every moment to our destined home.]

Let us, then, mark,

II. The conduct which the consideration of that state is calculated to inspire—

^c Heb. xi. 13, 14.

^d Ps. cii. 11.

^e Ps. xc. 9.

^f Jam. iv. 14.

Frequently is the consideration of that state urged upon us, as a motive to that habit of mind which the state itself demands. "I beseech you, then, as strangers and pilgrims^s,"

1. Be moderate in your regards for earthly things—

[A man intent on reaching his destined home, would not think of making a place his rest, because of its beautiful prospects or its comfortable accommodations. He would be pleased with them, and thankful for them as refreshments by the way; but he would not think of resting in them as his portion. So must we look beyond these transient things, and rest in nothing short of our destined home. To this effect is the counsel of the Apostle Paul: "This I say, Brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away^h." "Let your moderation, then, be known unto all men:" and "set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth."]

2. Be diligent in the prosecution of your journey heaven-ward—

[You have no time to lose. Whether your stay in this wilderness be more or less protracted, you will find every hour short enough for the making of such a progress as will ensure a happy termination of your labours. You are not merely in a journey; but in a race, which requires the most strenuous and unremitted exertions. Whatever advance you may have made, you are to "forget what is behind, and to press forward to that which is before, that so you may attain the prize of your high calling." And never are you to be weary of well-doing; for "then only will you reap, if you faint not."]

3. Avail yourselves of the aids which God has provided for you by the way—

[To his people in the wilderness, God gave a daily supply of manna from the clouds, and of water from the rock that followed them. And similar provision has he made for us also, in our way to the promised land: and, in the strength of it, we may prosecute our journey without fear. If we are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," what may we not undertake, with a full assurance of success? We need

^s 1 Pet. ii. 11.

^h 1 Cor. vii. 29, 30.

not draw back from any labour; for "the grace of Christ shall surely be sufficient for us:" nor need we fear any enemy; for we shall be "more than conquerors, through Him that loved us."]

4. Keep your eye fixed on heaven, as your home—

[What would ever divert your steps, or retard them for an instant, if you contemplated, as you ought, the blessedness that awaits you at the close of your journey? To be in your Father's house, in the very mansion prepared for you; yea, and in the very bosom of that Saviour, who went, as your forerunner, to prepare it—to have all your trials for ever terminated, and all your dangers for ever past, and all your labours for ever closed; and to have nothing but an eternity of bliss, such as no words can express, no imagination can conceive—what joy will you feel in the retrospect, what exultation in the prospect, and, above all, what recollections as arising from the stupendous mystery of redemption, whereby the whole has been accomplished for you! Set before you this prize; and then tell me, whether you will ever need any thing to carry you forward in your heavenly course. Truly, the contemplation of that glory will swallow up every thing else, even as the stars of heaven are eclipsed by the meridian sun. Joys will be no joys, and sorrows no sorrows—I mean, not worth being so accounted—if only you keep heaven in your view: for neither the comforts "nor the sufferings of this present life are worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us¹." Moses^k, and Paul^l, and all the saints^m, yea, and even the Lord Jesus Christ himselfⁿ, were animated by this thought: and, if it fully possess your mind, you can never faint, nor ever come short of the rest that remaineth for you^o.]

¹ Rom. viii. 18.

^k Heb. xi. 24—26.

^l Acts xx. 24.

^m Heb. xi. 35.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 2.

^o 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

CCCXCIII.

UPRIGHTNESS OF HEART REQUIRED.

1 Chron. xxix. 17. *I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness.*

THE true way to form a correct estimate of our actions is, to consider the principles from which they flow: for it is very possible that an act, which may be highly esteemed amongst men, may be an utter "abomination in the sight of God^a," on account of

^a Luke xvi. 15.

the motives by which we have been actuated in the performance of it. Jehu obeyed an express command of God in destroying the house of Ahab; and was even rewarded by God for it; whilst yet he was also punished for it, because, in what he did, he was impelled only by his own pride and vanity, instead of consulting, as he should have done, the glory of his God^b. “Man looketh only on the outward appearance; but God looketh at the heart^c.” The efforts which David made in preparing for the erection of the Temple were amazing: yet, if they had proceeded from a desire of man’s applause, they would have been of no value before God. But David sought only to glorify his God: and for his integrity, in this respect, he could appeal, yea, and *did* appeal, to the heart-searching God: “I know, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness:” and I can affirm, as in thy presence, that “in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things^d.”

From this striking and confident declaration, I shall take occasion to shew,

I. What is here affirmed of God—

Two things are here asserted respecting God:

1. His knowledge of the human heart—

[“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good^e.” Nor is it a mere cursory view which he takes of the things that are passing in the world: he inspects them all: he marks the most hidden actions of mankind: he observes with accuracy the principles from which they flow. Not so much as a thought escapes his notice; no, nor the most fleeting “imagination of a thought^f.” “He searches the heart, and tries the reins^g,” in order that not the slightest motion of the soul may escape him. He so “ponders the ways of men^h,” that not a turn in them is unobserved; and so “weighs their spiritsⁱ,” as infallibly to ascertain the precise measure of every principle contained in them. In natural productions, this is done with a considerable degree of accuracy

^b Compare 2 Kings x. 30. with Hos. i. 4.

^d The text, with the clause following it.

^f Gen. vi. 5. 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

^h Prov. xxi. 2.

^e 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

^g Prov. xv. 3.

ⁱ Ps. vii. 9.

ⁱ Prov. xvi. 2.

by chemists: but no chemist can subject the heart of man to this process: *that* is the work of God alone^k: but it is a work which he is executing every day, and every hour, over the face of the whole earth: and in his book of remembrance he records the result of his observations on every child of man^l. In truth, if he did not thus search the heart, he would not be able to judge the world. But, seeing that "all things are naked and opened before him, and that he is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart^m," and that the darkest recesses of it are to him as clear as the light of dayⁿ, we may, without hesitation, say with Job, "I know that no thought can be withholden from thee^o."]

2. His love of uprightness—

[He requireth truth in the inward parts^p; and whatever is contrary to it, he utterly abhors. "He made man upright" in the first instance^q, and pronounced his work to be "very good^r." In his works of grace he seeks to restore to man that uprightness: and never will he look with complacency on any child of man, till that change is wrought. By uprightness, however, we are not to understand sinless perfection: for, if none but those who have attained *that* were objects of his love, there would not be found one upon the face of the whole earth; seeing that "there is no man that liveth, and sinneth not^s." But, in *desire* and *purpose*, we must be perfect. There must be in us no *allowed* sin. "Our heart must be right with God^t." He will not endure "a divided heart^u." There must be in us a simplicity of aim and intention: no leaning to self; no corrupt bias; no undue mixture of carnal motives or principles: we must be "without guile in our spirit^x," if we would approve ourselves to him. Where a person of this character is, God views him with pleasure^y, and listens to him with delight^z. The testimony borne to Nathanael is a clear evidence of this. No human eye saw him "under the fig-tree;" nor could any person, who had seen him, have ventured to pronounce upon his character in such decided terms. But God had searched his heart, and "found it perfect before him^a." That his delight in such characters might be fully known, he has recorded it in his word; and, for the encouragement of all future generations, has borne witness to Nathanael, saying, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile^b."

^k Rev. ii. 23.

ⁿ Ps. cxxxix. 11, 12.

^q Eccl. vii. 29.

^r Ps. lxxviii. 37.

^s Prov. xv. 8, 9.

^t John i. 47.

^l Ps. lvi. 8.

^o Job xlii. 2.

^p Gen. i. 26, 31.

^u Hos. x. 2.

^x Prov. xi. 20.

^m Heb. iv. 12.

^p Ps. li. 6.

^a 1 Kings viii. 46.

^x Ps. xxxii. 2.

^z 2 Kings xx. 3.

Know, then, that "God has pleasure in uprightness." He has pleasure in it as a conformity to his Law, a correspondence with his own image, the very end and consummation of all his works.]

Such being the mind of Almighty God, let us consider,

II. What effect the knowledge of it should produce upon us—

No subject whatever has a wider scope, or needs more to be seen in all its diversified bearings, than that before us. The consideration of God's omniscience, and of his exclusive approbation of what is holy, should operate forcibly on every child of man. It should operate to make us,

1. Humble in our review of our past lives—

[Who amongst us could stand, if God were to enter into judgment with us? Who, if God should "lay judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet," would be found to have been upright before him? Let us take even the best day of our whole lives, and try ourselves by the holy Law of God; or rather, not by the Law as it is in itself, but as it has been known and understood by *us*? Let us take even *our own* standard of duty to God and man, and say whether we have fulfilled—whether we have even striven to fulfil it? whether we have laboured, as men in earnest, to get our views of duty rectified and enlarged, in order that we might not, through ignorance, come short of it in any thing? Let us think whether we can appeal to the omniscient and heart-searching God, that we have studied his blessed word in order to learn his will, and cried to him for grace to enable us for the performance of it? In short, let us see, whether for one day or hour we have been truly upright before God, so as to have not a wish of our hearts comparable to that of pleasing, serving, glorifying him? If, then, we cannot stand this test even for the best day of our whole lives, what must have been our state taken in the aggregate, from the first moment of our existence to the present hour? Tell me whether it is possible for us to abase ourselves too much? Job, with all his perfection, "abhorred himself in dust and ashes^c:" tell me, then, what should be the posture of our souls before God? Verily, there should not be a day or an hour, throughout all our future lives, wherein we should not "put our

^c Job xlii. 6.

hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust, crying, Unclean, Unclean^d!”]

2. Earnest in our desires to be found in Christ—

[Whither should such guilty creatures flee, but to the Saviour? to Him who has expiated our guilt, and wrought out a righteousness wherein we may stand accepted before God? To think of procuring remission of our sins by any obedience of our own, were madness. Satan himself might attempt it as reasonably as we. O! with what joy should we hear of the provision made for us in the Gospel!—of an incarnate God! of a sacrifice for sin! of a sacrifice commensurate with the necessities of a ruined world! of a free access to the Father through that sacrifice! of acceptance with Him, simply through faith in it as a propitiation for our sins! of every thing being treasured up in Christ for us^e, so that it may be secured against a possibility of being lost^f, and may “be received at all times, out of his fulness,” through the exercise of faith and prayer^g! Let us but see in what light we stand before God, as viewed in ourselves, and we shall most cordially unite with the Apostle Paul, in “desiring to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, which is of the Law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ^h.”]

3. Watchful against the assaults of our great adversary—

[Even in Paradise, whilst yet our first parents retained their integrity, did Satan prevail to beguile them. What, then, will he not do with us, if we be not constantly on our guard against him? He can assume “the appearance of an angel of lightⁱ!” how, then, can we hope to stand against his wiles, if Almighty God do not interpose to preserve us? It is not necessary for his purpose, that he should draw us into gross sin: he effects our destruction no less certainly, if he only “beguile us from the simplicity that is in Christ^k.” If he succeed only so far as to keep us from being upright before God, he needs no more to ruin us for ever. Beloved Brethren, reflect on this, and cry mightily to God to arm you against him on every side^l; that, whether he assume the violence of a lion^m, or the subtlety of a serpentⁿ, he may never be able to prevail against you.]

4. Faithful in examining every motion of our hearts—

^d Lev. xiii. 49. Lam. iii. 29.

^e Col. iii. 3.

^f 2 Cor. xi. 14.

^g 1 Pet. v. 8.

^h John i. 16.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^k Rev. xii. 9.

^l Col. i. 19.

^m Phil. iii. 9.

ⁿ Eph. vi. 11.

[If Satan were less active, we should still be in continual danger, from the deceitfulness and depravity of our own hearts. We are ever ready to “put evil for good, and darkness for light^o.” Self-love is so predominant in the best of us, that we rarely can discern, and never without the most careful observation, the true motives by which we are actuated. We give ourselves credit for a purity, which we but rarely attain: and hence, in ten thousand instances, we deceive our own souls^p. But we cannot deceive God. When he searches our heart and tries our reins, we cannot impose on him. The least obliquity of mind or principle is as obvious to him, as the greatest and most open enormity. We should therefore carefully examine ourselves as to the motives and principles from which we act; yea, and should beg of God, also, to “search and try us, and to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting^q.”]

5. Constant in prayer for more abundant grace—

[It is by the grace of Christ alone that we can do any thing that is good^r. Without that, we should be “carried captive by the devil at his will.” But it is not by grace once received, that we are to stand: we must have daily supplies of grace: and in seasons of temptation we must have a greater measure of grace imparted to us, according to the augmented measure of our necessities. But this can only be brought in by prayer. St. Paul, under the buffetings of Satan, cried earnestly to the Lord Jesus Christ for succour and support. Yet he did not at first succeed. Therefore he renewed his supplications again and again; till at last the Lord Jesus Christ answered him, “My grace is sufficient for thee;” and assured him, that “Jehovah’s strength should be made perfect in his weakness^s.” *This* enabled the Apostle to “glory in his infirmities;” and to acquiesce cheerfully in the trial, from a confidence that “the power of Christ should rest upon him.” So should we also, under a sense of our constant liability to fall, commit ourselves entirely to God; crying with eager and constant importunity, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe^t.”]

6. Careful in our endeavours to approve ourselves to God—

[To God we should act, and not to man. Through a sweet consciousness that he was doing this, David could rejoice in his own uprightness: as Paul also did, when he said, “Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in sim-

^o Isai. v. 20.

^p Jam. i. 26.

^q Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^r John xv. 5.

^s 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^t Ps. cxix. 117.

plicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world^u." Our wisdom is, to "set the Lord alway before us^x," and to walk as in his immediate presence. We know what an influence the eye of a fellow-creature has over us, in things which are cognizable to him: and if we could realize the idea of God's presence, and see inscribed on every place, "Thou, God, seest us^y," we should walk far more circumspectly than we do, particularly in our private intercourse with God. Endeavour, then, to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^z:" rest in no attainment short of that. "Let all guile be put away from you." Determine, through grace, that God himself shall discern no allowed evil within you: so shall you "walk holily and unblamably before God," and be kept "sincere and without offence until the day of Christ^a."]

^u 2 Cor. i. 12.

^z Col. iv. 12.

^x Ps. xvi. 8.

^a Phil. i. 10.

^y Gen. xvi. 13.

CCCXCIV.

LIBERALITY IN GOD'S SERVICE COMMENDED.

1 Chron. xxix. 17, 18. *Now have I seen with joy thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto thee. O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee.*

RELIGION, in whomsoever it is seen, is exceeding beautiful; and all its exercises and operations deserve our most attentive regard. But when it shines forth in persons of high station, or is exhibited in the united efforts of a multitude, it excites our highest admiration. Who can behold the three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost, "all of one heart and one soul," all living together in the devoutest fellowship with God and each other^a, and dividing with each other their possessions, that, being supported out of one common stock^b, they might be entirely freed from all care about the things of this world; who can behold this, I say, and not admire "the exceeding grace of God in them?" In the chapter before us we have a

^a Acts ii. 41—47.

^b Acts iv. 32—34.

powerful monarch at the head of all the chief men in his kingdom, devoting their property to God, for the purpose of erecting a stately edifice to his honour. The prayer which David offered on the occasion, in the hearing of them all, expressed, doubtless, their sentiments as well as his own, and shews that they were actuated, not by warm affections only, but by a just and heavenly principle: for, while they were performing a most exalted act of piety towards God, they were not elated with pride, but filled with gratitude to him for enabling and inclining them to render him this service.

In discoursing on the words which we have just read, we shall consider them,

I. In reference to the history before us—

David had purposed to build a house unto the Lord: but his intention, though approved and applauded by his God, was not suffered to be carried into execution, “because he had been a man of war, and had shed much blood.” Nevertheless he made great preparations for it, in order that he might at least testify the sincerity of his wishes, and facilitate the accomplishment of them in God’s appointed time. The princes and people heartily concurred with him in this good work; and thereby filled his soul with joy and gratitude. We may notice in the text,

1. The grounds of his joy—

[His subjects manifested on this occasion an extraordinary *zeal for God’s honour*, and *liberality in his service*. Had they been disposed to excuse themselves from engaging in this expensive work, they might have urged many specious reasons for declining it. They might have said, ‘God has not required this at our hands; why then should we do it? His “ark has abode within curtains” for five hundred years; why then should it not continue to do so? Must not any building which we can raise, be altogether unworthy of his notice? Have we not other, and more imperious, calls for our money? Have we not many poor, whom we might relieve; and many ignorant, for whom we might provide instruction? Besides, have not our families a claim upon us, that we should not so prodigally lavish the wealth by which we are enabled to provide for

them?' But no such objections were made. A desire to glorify God swallowed up every selfish and worldly consideration; and the people vied with each other in contributing to the utmost of their power, insomuch that above thirty millions in gold and silver were dedicated by them to this service.

And was not this a proper ground of joy to the pious monarch? It was *at least a presumptive proof that their souls were penetrated with true religion*. Some indeed might have been influenced by baser motives; but the greater part were doubtless animated by love to God: for they had been long amassing riches for this particular end: and, if their principle had not been good, it would scarcely have operated so uniformly and to such an extent. What then could afford a more just occasion of joy than such a sight, whether to a prince among his subjects, or a minister among his people, or a parent among his children? Every one in whom true piety exists, must of necessity rejoice in beholding such a testimony of piety in others. But the people's conduct was also *a pledge that the grand design should in due time be completed*. David had set his heart on having the work accomplished, though it was not to be performed by him, or even during his life. Large as his own donations had been, they would not have been sufficient without the aid of others: and if his own example had not been followed while he was present to exert his influence, he could have but little hope that any attention would be paid to it after his death. But no room for such fears was left. The people's zeal and liberality ensured success: and nothing remained, but that the plan which God himself had given him for every part of the work, should be executed by Solomon his son. Well might he rejoice in such a prospect. Well might he exult in the thought, that in this amazing undertaking he had not laboured in vain or run in vain.]

2. The expressions of his love—

[Good impressions, especially when our temporal interests are likely to be affected by them, are very apt to languish and decay. As the gratitude of the Israelites, promising as it appeared at the first moment when their enemies were overwhelmed in the sea, vanished within the space of a few days, so the zeal and liberality which are called forth on some particular occasions are too often found to yield after a time to the suggestions of prudence and economy. None but God can "put a good desire into the heart^c;" nor can any but God preserve it there. Under a full conviction of this truth, David entreated God to "keep these good dispositions in the hearts

^c 2 Cor. viii. 16.

of his people," and to "prepare more fully and entirely their hearts unto him." The accumulation of words which he uses on this occasion suggests, that, if there be not a living principle of piety in the heart, the actings of it will be of short continuance; if there be no spring or fountain, the channel will soon cease to flow.

Now this devout application to God on their behalf was the strongest possible expression of his love towards them: for what other thing could tend so much either to their present or eternal felicity as a continuance of these liberal and devout affections? *It conduced exceedingly to their present happiness.* From the joy which they manifested on the occasion, it might be supposed rather that they had unexpectedly *acquired* some large property. *This* would have been a more common and natural source of joy. But they felt happiness in *parting with* their wealth: they found it "more blessed to give than to receive:" they experienced a more refined and elevated pleasure than the largest acquisitions could possibly have conveyed^d. And, instead of thinking that they conferred any obligation upon God by these sacrifices, they felt themselves indebted to him, in exact proportion to the cheerfulness and liberality with which they were enabled to offer to him^e. Moreover *it tended also to their eternal happiness.* Their gifts could not purchase heaven, it is true; nor could their liberality *merit* any thing at God's hands: but God has been graciously pleased to say, that even "a cup of cold water, if given to him, or for his sake, in a becoming manner, shall in no wise lose its reward:" nay, he would consider himself as "unrighteous, if he were to forget our works and labours of love which we have shewn towards his name^f." Without arrogating any *merit* to ourselves therefore, we may say, that "the fruits of generosity shall abound to our account^g;" that "what we lay out for the Lord shall be repaid us again^h;" and that in being ready to distribute our wealth in his service, we "lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal lifeⁱ."

On these accounts David prayed that these holy dispositions might be kept alive in their hearts; and in this prayer he expressed in the most effectual manner his love towards them. If he had flattered them, he might have gratified their pride; but in praying for them he consulted their best interests.]

Having noticed the words in reference to the history before us, we shall consider them,

^d 2 Cor. viii. 9.

^f Heb. vi. 10.

^h Prov. xix. 17.

^e ver. 14.

^g Phil. iv. 17.

ⁱ 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.

II. In reference to that which is typically represented by it^k—

The material temple was a type of the Christian Church, even of that temple which is “built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.”

This temple we are now called upon to build—

[God has of late years stirred up an almost unprecedented zeal to erect this temple in heathen lands. Every denomination of Christians has stood forth on this occasion. The Moravians, with unrivalled perseverance, led the way. Independents and Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians, have followed, according to their respective abilities. The Church of England has long had two Societies engaged in this glorious cause^m: and of late a third has arisen, whose attention is principally directed to AFRICA and THE EASTⁿ. None of these interfere with each other: there is room for all; and there is need of all. It might be thought better perhaps if all were combined in one: but, considering what human nature is, we cannot expect that all should so perfectly coalesce, as to prosecute their plans with sufficient unanimity: and it is certain that far greater efforts are likely to be made, when all can exert themselves in a way congenial with their own sentiments, than if they were called upon to support a plan which they did not wholly approve.

That such a spirit should be so generally diffused, must

^k If this were the subject of a Sermon for *Charity* or *Sunday Schools*, the words following the text, “*And give unto Solomon my son a perfect heart,*” should form a part of the text. Then the second head might be treated in reference to, 1st, The Christian Church; and 2dly, The souls of men. *Under the former* of these the propriety of supporting Missions might be stated; and *under the latter*, (see 1 Cor. vi. 19. and 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.) the importance of having the soul built up as an habitation for God. The necessity of postponing all other considerations to *this* may be shewn from hence, that if David *disposed of his wealth* so liberally for the constructing of an edifice of stone for God, much more should we *disregard the acquiring of wealth* in comparison of making our souls a temple for him. A particular address might then be made to the children, to shew them, that the ultimate end of the charity was to put them in the way of obtaining a perfect heart, and that they should concur in this design to the utmost of their power.

^l Eph. ii. 20.

^m That for promoting Christian Knowledge; and that for propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

ⁿ Here an account may be given of what has been done by them.

surely be a matter of rejoicing to every one that has the interests of religion at heart. And we trust that, in reference to this assembly, *we* may adopt the words of the text, “Now have I seen with joy thy people which are present here to offer willingly unto thee.”]

Let us then imitate the example now set before us:

1. Let us offer willingly—

[Difficulties and objections are very apt to arise in the mind, especially when we want a plea for withholding or limiting our contributions. But what objection can be urged, which would not have had incomparably greater force on the foregoing occasion? Indeed the reasons that should animate us to exertion, are ten-fold stronger than any which David could have urged in support of his measure. God might have been known and worshipped, even though that costly edifice had not been reared: but how shall he be known among the heathen, if none be sent to instruct them? How could he have been known by *us* when in our heathen state, if none had pitied our ignorance, and laboured for our relief? Since then “we have freely received, should we not freely give?” Though we have too much ignorance at home, yet all have some means of instruction: and there are none so far from God, but that the sound of the Gospel may reach their ears, and convert their souls. But this is not the case with the heathens. If we send them not the light of divine truth, they must abide in darkness and the shadow of death. Let us therefore discard from our minds every thought, except that of zeal for God and compassion for our fellow-creatures. And “let us give not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver.”]

2. Let us offer bountifully—

[If we had been asked, what would be proper for David to give towards the building of the temple, we should probably have thought ten thousand pounds a large sum: we should scarcely have judged it reasonable to require of him so large a subscription as an hundred thousand pounds: yet he not only gave as much as that, but ten times as much; yea, a hundred times as much; yea, almost two hundred times as much. Independent of the immense treasures dedicated as spoils taken from his enemies, he gave, out of his own purse, gold and silver to the amount of above eighteen millions of money. And what was it that prompted him to such astonishing liberality? He himself tells us in the preceding context; “I have prepared with all my might . . . because I have set my affection to the house of my God^o.” Let the same principle operate in us: let

^o ver. 2, 3.

us set our affection to the work of Christ, and the salvation of our fellow-creatures, and then our ability alone will determine the measure of our contributions. Instead of waiting for arguments to overcome a parsimonious and reluctant spirit, we shall be "willing of our own selves to give, not only according to our ability, but even beyond our proper ability; and with much entreaty we shall urge and compel, as it were, the acceptance of our gifts" for the furthering of this blessed cause^p. The rich will give largely out of their abundance; and the poor will be casting in their not less acceptable mite; and all will unite in adoring God for the opportunity afforded them to shew their love to him.]

3. Let us give in due order—

[There is an offering which God requires, previous to his acceptance of any other: it is this; "My son, give me thy heart^q." Here then we must put to *you* the question which David put to his subjects on that glorious occasion; "Who amongst you is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord^r?"

Who will consecrate himself to God *as a Christian*? It would be a blessed day indeed, if you were all as unanimous in this, as that assembly were in devoting their treasures unto God. Could we but see you offering to him your hearts, we need not add a word respecting your property; for you would feel that it is not possible to dispose of that in any other way so happily for yourselves, so beneficially for the world, or so honourably to God. Give then, I say, like the Macedonians; of whom St. Paul says, that "out of their deep poverty they abounded unto the riches of liberality:" but, like them, "give *first* YOUR OWN SELVES unto the Lord^s." Then you will know, that all which you have is his; and make no account of your property, but as it may be subservient to his glory^t.

Permit me to ask further, Who will consecrate himself to God *as a Missionary*? It is in vain that materials are collected for a building, if there be none found to construct the edifice. And alas! here is the difficulty, here the want! Of those who are destined to the service of their God, how few are found willing to sacrifice their earthly prospects, and their carnal ease! When God calls them to an arduous and self-denying service, how do they, like Moses, multiply their excuses, when they are actuated only by a fear of the cross! God has been for many years saying to us of the Established Church, "Who will go for us?" but there have been few

^p 2 Cor. viii. 3, 4.

^q Prov. xxiii. 26.

^r ver. 5.

^s 2 Cor. viii. 2, 5. See also 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

^t ver. 14, 16.

Isaiahs found to answer, "Here am I, send me^u." O that there were less reason for that complaint, "All men seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's^x!" If we even knew that the fruits of our labours would not appear to any great extent in our day, it were no reason for declining the service to which we are called. David sowed, that others might reap: our blessed Lord did the same: I pray God there may be some found amongst us inclined and qualified to follow their examples.]

TO CONCLUDE—

[If there be any, whether in the ministry or out of it, who desire to be the Lord's, we pray that "our Covenant-God would keep this in the imagination of the thoughts of their hearts for ever." And if the raising of God's spiritual temple among the heathen be an object worthy of our regard, let us now vie with each other in our endeavours to promote it, and shew our sense of its importance by the cheerfulness and extent of our donations.]

^u Isai. vi. 8.

^x Phil. ii. 21.

2 CHRONICLES.

CCCXCV.

USE OF CHURCH MUSIC.

2 Chron. v. 13, 14. *It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.*

EVERY duty which we owe to God is excellent in its season; nor is there any which is not peculiarly suitable for particular persons, and under particular circumstances. Repentance, prayer, attendance on the preached Gospel, are eminently proper, not for the ungodly alone, but for the saints also, whenever a sense of ignorance, guilt, or helplessness, call for such exercises. But the duty of praise seems to claim a just preference before all others, not only because it is more pleasant, and more comely for the upright, but because in all others we receive from God; whereas in this we give to God. Indeed God himself declares, that he is more especially honoured by the due performance of this duty; "Whoso offereth me praise, glorifieth me:" and in my text, he has given the most abundant testimony of its acceptableness to him.

Solomon having finished the temple, had now brought up the ark of the Lord, and placed it in the

holy of holies;—he had also offered innumerable sacrifices on this glorious occasion; and, while he was praising God in concert with the priests and Levites, and an immense band of vocal and instrumental music, God came down into the temple, and filled it with his glory; “It came even to pass, as the trumpeters,” &c. &c.

In discoursing upon these words, we shall consider,

- I. The manner in which they praised God;
 - II. The subject-matter of their praise;
 - III. The token which God gave them of his approbation.
- I. Let us consider the manner in which they praised God—

Never since the creation of the world was there a more glorious display of religious zeal than at the dedication of Solomon’s temple. Solomon had assembled “the elders of Israel, even the heads of all the tribes, and the chief men in all the families of Israel, to Jerusalem.” He had collected also, not the priests of one particular course, but all the priests and all the Levites, to assist in this solemnity: and this vast concourse of people, after having deposited the ark in the place prepared for it, joined in praises and thanksgivings to God: they praised God, *unitedly*: we are told that “the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound.” It is much to be regretted, that, in our worshipping assemblies, the greater part of the congregation never join in this part of the service: they seem to think, that they are not interested in it, and that it may well be left to those few who may have studied music as a science. But would it not appear absurd in the highest degree, if the prayers also were left to a few select persons, and the bulk of the congregation were to sit still, as though they had no need to join in the devotions? And if this would be so evidently absurd in the one part of the service, why should it

not be so in the other? All indeed are not *alike* qualified to join aloud; but there are very few who might not, by a little attention, easily qualify themselves to join in this act of worship; nor can there be any one who is not bound at least to exercise his mind, and “make melody in his heart to the Lord.” Indeed this is one great use of musical instruments in the public worship; they are serviceable to unite voices which might otherwise be discordant, and to help forward those, who through ignorance or diffidence might otherwise be silent. Therefore David, in the last Psalm, exhorts us to praise the Lord with stringed instruments and with *organs*; and well knowing how easy it would be with such helps to sing, he adds, “Let every thing that hath breath, praise the Lord.”

We must not however imagine, that the mere lifting up of the voice is a sacrifice pleasing to God: no; he requires the service of the heart: and therefore we observe, in the next place, that they praised God *devoutly*.

It is said, in my text, that the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound “in praising and thanking the Lord.”

We know, that the uttering of a prayer without any sense of our need, or any desire of the things we ask for, is no other than a solemn mockery, which is in the highest degree displeasing to God: so the singing of psalms and hymns without any sense of joy and gratitude, is a hypocritical service, and wholly unacceptable to God: we may indeed please the congregation, and establish our own reputation for skill; but these are very unworthy motives to be influenced by, when we are solemnly addressing the Most High God: persons actuated by such considerations sing to their own praise and glory, rather than to God's; and therefore they must rest satisfied with *their* reward, i. e. the reward they seek after; for it is certain that they will never receive any testimony of God's approbation. Let me therefore remind you all, that the end of singing is to thank and praise the

Lord; and that, whenever we join in psalms and hymns, we must be especially careful that we "make melody in our hearts to the Lord." In this we shall be greatly assisted by a judicious use of instrumental music;—which leads me to observe further, that the Jewish assembly praised God WITH INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC.

Many are prejudiced against church music; and it is certain, that it is capable of very great abuse: but it may also be employed to great advantage: it is said in my text, that they lifted up their voices with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music. Who can doubt but that the devotion of the congregation was greatly aided by these? Who can doubt, but that if Solomon, the wisest of men, at the most solemn season imaginable, not only used these instruments, but (as we shall have occasion presently to observe) was approved of God in the use of them, who can doubt, I say, but that they may be used to great advantage? As far indeed as they contributed to the pomp and grandeur of the temple worship, they may well be dispensed with under the Christian dispensation; since the excellence of the Gospel worship consists in its simplicity, in which respect it is directly opposite to the Jewish worship: but, inasmuch as it aided the devotion, its utility remains: and, I trust, that in a little time we shall find that effect arising from it.

In order to this, however, we must learn to distinguish between the natural effect of music on the organs of sense, and the spiritual effect of divine truths upon the soul. Those who attend only to the sound may experience the former; but to experience the latter, we must attend simply to the words we sing. We shall sing to little purpose "with the voice, if we sing not with our understanding also." To promote this, I proceed to set before you,

II. The subject-matter of their praise—

A sense of the divine goodness and mercy was that which inflamed their souls. David had before

recorded, in Ps. cxxxvi., the goodness of God, in his works of creation, providence, and redemption; and no less than twenty-six times in as many verses had he repeated that delightful truth, that "the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever." In all probability that Psalm was now used by Solomon's appointment; so that with the commemoration of every fresh act of mercy, the whole band united in singing, "For the Lord is good; for his mercy endureth for ever." The grand subject therefore of their praise was, the goodness and mercy of God. And what abundant ground was here for praise! Who that surveys the wonders of creation, must not see the goodness of God stamped indelibly on every part of the universe? Who that sees the sun, ruling by day, and the moon and stars, ruling by night; who that sees this terrestrial globe furnished with every thing which can contribute to the happiness both of the rational and irrational creation; who that observes the variety and the beauty of God's works, the fitness of every creature for its use, the subordination of one creature to another, and the joint concurrence of all to one common end; who that observes the fabric of the human body, that is so fearfully and wonderfully made, or reflects on the powers of the soul, which can in an instant soar from earth to heaven, and there contemplate not the heavenly bodies only, but even the Maker of them; who, I say, can view any part of the creation, and not exclaim with the Psalmist, "The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all his works?" Nor does his goodness less appear in the works of *Providence*: David, in the Psalm we have referred to, recounts most of the gracious acts which God had performed towards the Jewish nation from the first bringing of them out of Egypt to the time he penned that Psalm: those were no doubt recited with joy and gladness. And may not we also look back through the annals of our history, and see how often God has preserved us from our enemies, how he has prospered our nation in ten thousand instances, and how he is yet protecting us

from foreign invasion and domestic tumults? Do we not see how good he is to us in making the earth to bring forth plenteously, and in providing for all our returning wants? May not every individual amongst us too trace the peculiar kindness of Providence to himself, in averting ills, or overruling them for good? Surely we have all experienced enough of God's goodness to make us joyfully unite in songs of praise. But most of all is the goodness of God conspicuous in the work of *redemption*: *this* the Psalmist notices particularly, though indeed in but few words. The Jews fixed their attention more on the typical redemptions: but now that the shadows are removed, and the substance is set before us, we should survey the redemption of Christ with incessant wonder. Behold the goodness of God in giving us his only Son; in laying our iniquities on him; and in opening the kingdom of heaven to all believers! Behold him satisfying his own justice by the sufferings of his Son, and opening a way for the exercise of his mercy towards us consistently with his other perfections! This is the wonder; this is the bright display of goodness; this is the subject-matter of thanksgiving, to all the saints on earth, and all the saints in heaven. O that every tongue might pay its tribute of praise! and that we might all with united hearts and voices proclaim, that "the Lord is good!"

A further subject of their praise was the *mercy* of God, "His mercy endureth for ever." How eminently did this appear in God's dealings with the Jewish nation! for, notwithstanding all their murmurings and rebellions in the wilderness, he brought them into the land which he had promised them: and in due time he raised up his servant David, to whom he had confirmed all the promises which he had made unto the patriarchs; and now at last he had in a figure taken possession of the temple of Solomon, as a typical representation of his future dwelling in the temple of Christ's body. These were proofs of the perpetuity of God's mercy, and that he would not withdraw it from those to whom he

had promised it. But here again *we* survey his mercy in far brighter colours: we see *indeed* that it endureth for ever: we have seen the mercy promised to our fathers long since performed: we have seen the Son of God, the Saviour of the world; we have seen him living, dying, rising, and resuming his throne of glory: we have seen him making an end of sin, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness; and now we behold him pouring out all the blessings of redemption on his Church and people. At this moment is his mercy as full and free as at the time he died upon the cross: at this instant do his bowels yearn over sinners: he invites them all, and importunes them to accept his proffered salvation: and to those who have tasted of his mercy he still continues to be gracious: he keepeth mercy for thousands, when they would cast it utterly away: he does not in anger shut up his tender mercies: he will chastise, but not cast off: he will “hide his face for a little moment; but with everlasting kindness will he have mercy upon us.”

Such was the subject-matter of *their* praise: and shall *our* tongues be silent? Have we not incomparably greater cause for thanksgiving than the Jews were even able to conceive? Let the praises of God then be in our lips; and let us unite our hearts and voices in declaring the goodness and mercy of our God.

Were this more the frame of our hearts, surely we should find God more frequently present in our worshipping assemblies; for he would certainly never leave us without “witness that we pleased him.”

This brings us to consider,

III. The testimony which God gave them of his approbation—

God had often vouchsafed to appear in a visible manner to his people: he went before them in a cloud through the wilderness, and conducted them in all their journeys: and, when Moses had finished the tabernacle according to the direction given him

by God, it pleased God to give him a signal token of his presence and approbation. In Exod. xl. 34, 35, it is said, "Then (when Moses had finished the work) a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle: and Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Exactly similar to this was the testimony which God now gave of his approbation, both to Solomon and all the assembly: "he came down in a cloud, and filled the house with his glory, so that the priests could not stand to minister there any longer."

This cloud was the Shechinah, or symbol of the divine presence: and its coming down, and filling the place at that time, was a signal manifestation of the divine favour. This shadowy representation of the Deity was suited to that dispensation, wherein every thing was wrapped up in obscure types and shadows: it was calculated to strike their senses, and impress them with reverence for God; while, at the same time, the effect which it produced upon the priests served to intimate, that, when Christ should come, and the Deity truly appear in the temple of Christ's body, the priests should cease to minister in their former manner, and the whole of that dispensation should be done away.

It is particularly proper on this occasion to notice the exact time when God was pleased to vouchsafe this remarkable testimony of his approbation. If we look to the text, we shall see that it was not when the sacrifices were offered, nor even when the ark was deposited in its place; but it was when the singers and the players on the musical instruments joined in one grand chorus of praise and thanksgiving: "It came even to pass, *as the trumpeters and singers were as one*, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and *when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music*, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever; that *then* the

house was filled with a cloud." We cannot doubt but that God approved of every part of this grand ceremony : but that which crowned the whole was, the tribute of praise offered by the chorus of vocal and instrumental music. We have before observed, that this, without the heart, would be a vain offering indeed : but, with the heart, no doubt it is pleasing and acceptable to God in the highest degree : it comes as near as possible to the worship of heaven, where, in one grand concert, they strike their golden harps, and sing, " Salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever ! " In Rev. xiv. 1—3, St. John beheld in a vision the glorious company of heaven ; and he says, " I looked, and, lo ! a Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder : and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps ; and they sung as it were a new song before the throne." Shall not we therefore endeavour to anticipate that blessed employment ? shall not we strive to bring down heaven upon earth ? shall not we from henceforth lift up our voices unto God, and every one be ambitious to join as in one general chorus ? Yes, my Brethren, let me hope that many of you will unite your endeavours : call to mind the goodness of your God ; think of his manifold and never-ending mercies ; think of Jesus the fountain and foundation of all your blessings ; stir up your hearts to gratitude ; let not one be silent ;—and while we are united in singing the high praises of our God, may God himself come down in the midst of us, and fill the house with his glory ! Amen, and Amen !

CCCXCVI.

GOD'S ACCEPTANCE OF DAVID'S GOOD DESIRES.

2 Chron. vi. 7, 8. *Now it was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the Lord God of Israel.*

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But the Lord said to David my father, Forasmuch as it was in thine heart to build an house for my name, thou didst well, in that it was in thine heart.

FROM our general notions of the Deity, we should be ready to imagine, that he would not only permit, but encourage, the execution of every good thought that could come into our minds. But "his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts:" he appoints unto men their work according to his sovereign will, and uses what instruments he pleases for the accomplishment of his own designs. Moses, who had brought the people of Israel out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness, was not permitted to conduct them into Canaan; he must devolve that office on Joshua, and die without seeing the completion of the work he had begun. Thus David had conceived a noble idea of building a temple unto the Lord, and had made preparations for it to a most astonishing extent: yet God suffered him not to execute the work, but ordered him to leave it to Solomon his son. At the dedication of the temple, Solomon brought this fact to the remembrance of the people, partly perhaps with a view to honour the memory of David his father, but principally to display the sovereignty of God who had appointed *him* to that office, and the faithfulness of God in having enabled him to complete the work. But at the same time that he mentions the prohibition given to David his father respecting the execution of his design, he declares God's gracious acceptance of the intention just as much as if it had been carried into effect, since it argued and evinced that state of mind which alone could have rendered the act itself acceptable in the sight of God.

In this incident, as related in our text, we notice,

I. The characteristic marks of true piety—

From the example before us, we see that,

1. Its aims are high—

[David sought to honour and exalt Jehovah's name: and wherever real piety exists, it will inspire us with similar views

and sentiments. To act merely with a view to this world, or for the promoting of our own interests, will appear unworthy of a rational and immortal being. We shall "look (that is, *aim*) not at the things which are visible and temporal, but at the things which are invisible and eternal." We shall carry this spirit into all the common acts and offices of life: "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we shall endeavour to do it all to the glory of God." In speaking on this subject, St. Paul uses an expression of peculiar force: he says, that "as Christ had been, so he should continue to be, *magnified* in his body, whether by life or death^a." Perhaps it may be thought, that such an aim was proper in an Apostle, but would be presumptuous in us: but it is equally proper for all; and indeed is necessary for all: for, "being not our own, but bought with a price, we should glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his^b."]

2. Its efforts earnest—

[David not only desired to build the temple, but collected materials for it, and contributed towards it to an incredible amount. Thus is piety always operative, and regards all earthly possessions as talents to be improved for God. The more those talents are multiplied to us, the greater obligation we shall feel to honour God with them: and every service which we are enabled to render him, we shall consider only as a step to further services. If we had attained the eminence even of Paul himself, and, like him, had laboured more than all the other Apostles, we should not be satisfied with any thing we had done, whilst any thing yet remained for us to do: we should "forget all that was behind, of the course we had already run, and reach forth unto that which was before, and press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus^c." Yes; "as many of us as are perfect and upright in the sight of God, will certainly be thus minded^d."]

3. Its desires are unbounded—

[Had David's means been augmented an hundred-fold, his desire to use them for God would have proportionably increased: his ability would still have been the measure of his exertions. True piety regards, not the opinion of the world, but the will of God: it looks at the precepts, the promises, the examples, set before us in the Scriptures; and makes them the standard of its aims and efforts. The precepts require us to "love and serve God with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength:" the promises give us reason to hope

^a Phil. i. 20.

^c Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^b 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

^d Phil. iii. 15.

that we shall be "cleansed from *all* unrighteousness," and "be renewed after *the image of our God* in righteousness and true holiness:" and God proposes himself to us as our pattern, that we should "be holy, *as he is holy*," and "be perfect, even as *our Father which is in heaven is perfect*." However short of these things the Christian falls in point of practice, he desires, if it were possible, to fulfil all that is required of him, and to attain "the full measure of the stature of Christ himself^e." In a word, he realizes in his experience the prayer of Epaphras, and "labours fervently and incessantly to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^f."]

Whoever possesses such piety in his heart, shall assuredly be honoured with,

II. God's approbation and acceptance of it—

Without the heart, no services that we can render to the Lord are pleasing to him—

[God says to every one of us, "My son, give me thy heart:" and, if we withhold that, he regards nothing else that we can give him: our very prayers and our praises are only an abomination to him^g — — —]

But, where the heart is, even the smallest services are pleasing in his sight—

[God judges not of our services by their magnitude in the eyes of men, but by the measure of love and zeal with which they are performed. The widow's mite was on this account considered as "*more*" than all the offerings of the rich: in itself, it was nothing; but, as indicating the state of her mind, it was above all price. And it is worthy of observation, that the most encouraging promises in Scripture are given to such expressions of our feelings as most indicate the sincerity of our hearts. A sigh, a groan, a look, a wish, a silent tear stealing down the cheek, are amongst the most acceptable offerings that we can present to God^h. And when his Holy Spirit operates most powerfully upon our hearts, it is "with groanings which cannot be utteredⁱ." If he looked at the outward services merely, the poor would labour under the greatest disadvantages: but we are assured, that he forms no such partial estimate of men's conduct; but that, "if there be first a willing mind, he accepts us according to what we have, and not according to what we have not^k;" so that, provided our exertions be proportioned

^e Eph. iv. 13.

^f Col. iv. 12.

^g Matt. xv. 7—9. Isai. i. 11, 13. Amos v. 21—23.

^h Ps. lxxix. 11. and xxxviii. 9. and xxxiv. 5. and x. 17. and cxlv. 19. and lvi. 8.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 23, 26.

^k 2 Cor. viii. 12.

to our ability, the poorest and weakest amongst us shall be approved and rewarded equally with those whose abilities and opportunities have been most enlarged: yea, if through the good providence of God we be incapacitated for any service whatever, yet, if we desire to serve God, he will bear testimony to us before all, saying, "Thou hast done well, in that it was in thine heart to serve me."]

APPLICATION—

That we may obtain such a testimony from the Lord,

1. Let the advancement of the Church be dear unto us—

[There is a temple which we are called to build, and of which the temple of Solomon was but a type and shadow; I mean, the Church of Christ, which to all eternity shall be "the habitation of God through the Spirit¹." For the advancement of that, we should long, and pray, and strive; and never cease from our exertions, till God himself "shall bring forth the head-stone, and the whole universe shall shout, Grace, grace unto it!"²]

2. Let us, in all that we do, be particularly attentive to our own hearts—

[Many sinister motives are apt to arise, and to pollute our best actions: our liberality is apt to savour of ostentation, and our spiritual affections of pride and vanity. But God, "to whom all things are naked and open," will judge according to what he sees in the inmost recesses of the heart; approving of the good that was there, though never carried into effect; and disapproving of our latent hypocrisy, by whatever specious appearances it had been concealed from mortal eyes. Only take care that the heart be right with God, and then all will be well with us, both in time and eternity.]

3. Let us be contented with doing what we can for God, though we should not succeed according to our wishes—

[If our labours be crowned with present success, we receive, as it were, a present recompence: but if our labour appear to be in vain, we may expect a suitable recompence hereafter. God will reward us, not according to our success,

¹ Eph. ii. 20—22. 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

² Zech. iv. 7.

³ If this were a *Mission Sermon*, or for *building a Church*, here would be the proper place to press the subject.

but according to our labour°. The very consciousness of endeavouring to honour God is itself an ample reward for all that we can do. Whether we ourselves reap, or leave others to enter into our labours, we should be equally well pleased to serve our God. Let this thought animate us all in our respective stations; and whether our abilities be more or less, let us all endeavour to obtain this testimony from the Lord, "*He hath done what he could*."]

° 1 Cor. iii. 8.

p Mark xiv. 8.

CCCXCVII.

CONDESCENSION OF GOD IN BECOMING INCARNATE.

2 Chron. vi. 18. *Will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth?*

IT is nothing but a want of reflection, that keeps us from being filled with incessant wonder and astonishment. The things which God has done for us in the works of creation and providence, if duly searched out, would furnish abundant matter for our profoundest adoration. But the provision which he has made for our redemption exceeds all the bounds of credibility. Even those manifestations of his mercy whereby he shadowed forth the mystery of his incarnation, were so stupendous, that Solomon, who beheld them, could scarcely believe his own eyes. He had erected a temple which was to be a type of Christ's human body. He had just seen God coming down in a cloud to take possession of that temple, and filling it with his glory. He was in the act of dedicating it to God, and of praying that it might be, as it were, an habitation for him: but struck with astonishment at the requests which he was presuming to offer, he pauses, and breaks forth into this hesitating, admiring, adoring exclamation, "But will God—in very deed—dwell—with men—on the earth?" This was an inconceivable act of condescension as it respected his symbolic presence in a temple of stone; but it was infinitely more so, as it respected his *real* presence in a body of flesh. To illustrate this we shall,

I. Contrast the characters of God and man—

We can be at no loss for matter to illustrate this subject, since light and darkness, or Christ and Belial, are not more opposite. But that we may not exceed the limits proper for this part of our discourse, we shall draw the contrast in two particulars only :

1. The majesty of God, and the meanness of man—

[We have no higher ideas of majesty than those which are conveyed under the terms appropriate to royalty. God therefore, in order to suit himself to our feeble apprehensions, adopts those terms in reference to himself. He assumes the *title* of a king; he is “King of kings, and Lord of lords^a.” He has moreover all the *ensigns of royalty*; “heaven is his throne, and earth his footstool^b.” Unnumbered hosts of angels are his *retinue*; “thousands of thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him^c.” Instead of the *equipage* of an earthly monarch, he “maketh the clouds his chariot, and rideth on the heavens as upon a horse^d.” So great is his majesty, that “all the nations of the earth are before him only “as the drop of a bucket, or as the small dust upon the balance;” yea, “they are less than nothing and vanity^e.” And so “terrible is his majesty,” that, “if he touch the mountains, they smoke; and, if he but look upon the earth, it trembles^f.” But in attempting to speak of his majesty, we only “darken counsel by words without knowledge.” Suffice it therefore to add, that “the heaven of heavens cannot contain him^g,” and that “his greatness is unsearchable^h.”

But what is man? an atom insect of an atom world. If we compare him with the globe on which we stand, he is a mere worm: but if we compare him with the visible creation; and still more, if we view the universe with the eye of a philosopher, if we compute the distances of the fixed stars, if we suppose that multitudes of them are, like our sun, the centre of different and independent systems; if we then compare him with these, what an insignificant being will he appear! The smallest grain of sand is not so diminutive in comparison of the whole terrestrial globe, as the whole human race would be when compared with the other works of God's hands. But unworthy as man is of God's notice in this view, he has

^a Rev. xvii. 14.^b Isai. lxvi. 1.^c Dan. vii. 10.^d Ps. civ. 3. and lxxviii. 4.^e Isai. xl. 15, 17.^f Ps. civ. 32.^g ver. 18.^h Ps. cxlv. 3.

rendered himself incomparably more unworthy by the commission of sin. By this he is become, not merely worthless, but odious and abominable. In this respect the whole human race are involved in one common lot: and so contemptible are they in his eyes, that there is scarce an animal among the brute creation to whom he does not liken them, and that too in reference to their most hateful qualities: from whence we may understand, that man is a compound of every thing that is noxious and hateful.

And can we conceive, that so great and glorious a Being as God should ever deign to notice man; and not only to notice him, but to dwell with him?]

2. The purity of God, and the sinfulness of man—

[Holiness is that attribute of the Deity which is most eminently glorified by the heavenly choir: they cry day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts!" On earth too this perfection is peculiarly admired by the saints, who "give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness^k." Such was God's abhorrence of iniquity, that he cast the fallen angels out of heaven. Nor can he behold sin in man, without feeling the utmost indignation against it^l. But why do we mention these things? Such is the holiness of God, that "he chargeth even his angels with folly^m;" and "the very heavens are not clean in his sightⁿ."

As for man, he is, unhappily, a perfect contrast to God in these respects. He is polluted in *every member of his body*, and in *every faculty of his soul*. The inspired writers seem to have laboured, as it were, to mark the extreme depravity of man, by specifying that his members are altogether instruments of unrighteousness^o: his "*eyes* are full of adultery^p," and his "*ears* deaf as an adder^q;" his "*mouth* and *lips* full of cursing and bitterness^r;" his "*tongue* is a world of iniquity, set on fire of hell^s," and "his *throat* an open sepulchre^t;" "*both* his *hands* are employed to work iniquity^u;" his "*feet* are swift to shed blood^x;" and, to complete the whole, "his *inward parts* are very wickedness^y." His *soul* is, if possible, yet more depraved: his *understanding* is blinded, so that it "puts evil for good, and darkness for light^z." His *will* is rebellious, so that it cannot bow to the commands of God^a. His *affections* are earthly and sensual. His *memory* is retentive

ⁱ Isai. vi. 3.

^m Job iv. 18.

^p 2 Pet. ii. 14.

^s Jam. iii. 6.

^x Rom. iii. 15.

^z 2 Cor. iv. 4. Isai. v. 20.

^k Ps. xxx. 4.

ⁿ Job xv. 15.

^q Ps. lviii. 4.

^t Rom. iii. 13.

^y Ps. v. 9.

^l Hab. i. 13.

^o Rom. vi. 13.

^r Rom. iii. 14.

^u Mic. vii. 3.

^a Rom. viii. 7.

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of what is evil, while it lets slip every good admonition or advice. His *conscience* is partial, excusing where it should condemn; and, in too many, it is "seared as with a hot iron."

Contrast this character with that of God; and then say, whether it be possible for God to dwell with man.]

Having thus prepared the way, we will,

II. Give an answer to the question proposed in the text—

Our answer is short: He not only *will* dwell with man on the earth; but he *has* done it. He has dwelt with man,

1. Symbolically—

[When Israel came out of Egypt, God went before them in all their way, and guided them by a pillar and a cloud: and even to the time of the Babylonish captivity, did he continue by that symbol of his presence to dwell in the midst of his people. This alone was sufficient to shew the condescension and grace of God; and to prove that he will make his abode with those who are the objects of his special favour.]

2. Personally—

[Wonderful as it may appear, God has taken upon him our nature and dwelt amongst us. In the fulness of time, he appeared on earth; and, though formed, without the intervention of man, by the agency of the Holy Ghost, he came into the world like other infants, passed through the helpless years of childhood, wrought at a low trade till the age of thirty; and then continued nearly four years longer in the exercise of his ministerial office, as the instructor of men, and the Saviour of the world. While he was despised and rejected of men, and accounted a worm and no man, he was "God over all blessed for evermore:" "in him dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily^b." It was in order to prepare the world for this, that he so often appeared to the patriarchal saints, and that he for so many centuries abode in the tabernacle and the temple. By manifesting himself in our flesh, he has clearly shewn, that "as his majesty is, so is his mercy."]

3. Mystically—

[There is yet another temple in which God delights to dwell, even in the broken and contrite heart^c. He has repeatedly promised, that he will thus distinguish those who seek him in spirit and in truth. "He will come to them, and

^b Col. ii. 9.

^c Isai lvii. 15.

make his abode with them^d." "He will dwell in their hearts by faith^e." "He will manifest himself unto them as he does not unto the world^f." It was in this way that he enabled all the primitive Christians to shine as lights in a dark world, and to maintain their steadfastness in the midst of the most cruel persecutions. It is in the same way that he still upholds and sanctifies his chosen people: "Such honour have all his saints."]

APPLICATION—

Has God in very deed dwelt with man on the earth? Then let us,

1. Marvel at our own ingratitude—

[Who would imagine that God should have become a man for us, and should offer moreover to dwell in our hearts, and that we should be so unmindful of him? Is it a light thing that he has done; to assume our nature, when he passed by the fallen angels; to assume it in its fallen debased state, as far as he could consistently with his own unspotted holiness; to assume it for the express purpose of bearing our sins and expiating them by his own death? Is it a light thing that he offers to do, when he begs us to open our hearts to him, that he may make them his habitation? Yet what are the returns we make him? We do indeed commemorate both his incarnation, and the descent of the Holy Spirit: but how? with holy feasting, and with spiritual joy? Do we not rather act, as if he came to liberate us from all restraints, and to give us a licence to forget him, and to abandon ourselves to carnal pleasure? Let us only reflect on the manner in which these holy seasons have been spent by all around us, and how little our own spirit and conduct have accorded with the mercies vouchsafed unto us, and we shall see reason to blush and be confounded, yea rather, to weep in dust and ashes.]

2. Seek to dwell with him in heaven—

[For what purpose has God revealed himself to us in this diversified and astonishing manner? Has it not been to display the exceeding riches of his grace, and to encourage our application to him for an interest in his favour? Yes; he would not that we should "dwell with everlasting burnings;" but rather that we should be made partakers of his glory. It was for this end that he became incarnate, and died upon the cross: it is for this end that he yet daily strives with us by his Spirit. In very deed he dwelt with man on earth, that

^d John xiv. 23.

^e Eph. iii. 17.

^f John xiv. 22.

we might dwell with God in heaven. Let us then make a suitable improvement of his unbounded mercy; and secure that exaltation, which he, by his own humiliation, has prepared for us.]

CCCXCVIII.

DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

2 Chron. vi. 41. *Arise, O Lord God, into thy resting-place, thou, and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness.*

THE fuller account of the dedication of Solomon's Temple is given us in the 8th chapter of the First Book of Kings. But in this place we have a most interesting part of Solomon's prayer, which in the former place is omitted. The piety and the pathos of these concluding sentences are worthy of the highest admiration. If we were to confine our notice of them to that particular occasion, they would be found replete with instruction: but, knowing as we do the figurative nature of that whole dispensation, we must of necessity point out the bearing of these words upon our own times, and upon the Christian Church: and for that purpose we will shew,

I. What Solomon desired as the crown of all his labours—

He had built the temple, which in grandeur and beauty exceeded any structure that ever existed upon earth; and he had deposited the ark in the place prepared for it. But he was not satisfied with having executed the office which God had so graciously assigned him: he desired that God would vouchsafe his presence in the temple, and render it the means of manifesting his own glory, and of dispensing his blessings to his favoured people: and, therefore, in this concluding prayer he implored,

1. The special presence of the Deity in the temple, as His fixed abode—

[The ark had hitherto dwelt only in a tabernacle which was moved from place to place. Henceforth it was to have an abiding resting-place in the temple. But in vain would the temple have been built, and in vain the ark fixed in its place, if God himself did not accompany the ark with his special presence. It had been hitherto "the ark of God's strength; because God had, on many occasions, wrought as it were in concert with it, exerting his almighty power wherever it went: but if he should detach himself from it, the people had already seen how incapable the ark itself was of affording them protection, when it had not been able even to protect itself from the Philistine army. Therefore Solomon prayed, that God himself would, by that symbol of his presence, the cloud of fire, abide upon it; and thereby give a public testimony of his approbation of the measures which had been adopted, and a visible pledge of his continued favour to his people.]

2. An abundant effusion of his promised blessings on all who should frequent it—

[Without this, no good end would be attained. Without this, God would not be glorified, nor sinners saved. Hence Solomon prayed for all, both priests and people, that the one might "be clothed with salvation," and the other "rejoice in goodness." That temporal prosperity was included in his petition is probable enough^a: but, doubtless, spiritual blessings were chiefly solicited, as the portion of them all. A holy priesthood is an inestimable blessing to any people: for, if "they who handle the Law transgress it^b," and "they who should be a light to others are themselves in darkness^c," what can be expected, but that a general declension should ensue? Hence he desired that the priests should be, not merely habited in white garments, but clothed with righteousness and salvation; that so they might be examples to the flock, and edify the people to whom they ministered. In behalf of the people, too, he desired that they should find a rich feast in all God's ordinances, "being abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house, and drinking there of the rivers of his pleasures^d." In a word, he desired that universal piety might prevail, and that the happiness attendant on it might be universally dispensed.]

But we hasten to shew,

II. What infinitely richer blessings we may expect under our more perfect dispensation—

^a Neh. ix. 25. ^b Jer. ii. 8. ^c Rom. ii. 19—21.

^d Ps. xxxvi. 8. with Isai. xxv. 6.

The temple, with every thing pertaining to it, was "a figure for the time then present," a "shadow of good things to come."

[Here we must view the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the true Ark, in which the tables of the Law were deposited, and on which the mercy-seat was placed, and into which the angels desired with incessant scrutiny to search^e. Yes, in the verse following my text, Solomon clearly refers to him: "O Lord God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David, thy servant!" What was the mercy here pre-eminently referred to? It was, that God in due time would raise up unto David that august progeny, "who should sit upon his throne; and of whose kingdom there should be no end^f." The very words of Solomon are so applied by the Prophet Isaiah^g, and so explained by St. Peter, who both cites them, and comments on them to this precise effect^h. But that which throws the fullest light upon this passage, is the 132d Psalm, (probably composed by Solomon himself on this very occasion,) wherein all the same expressions are twice used; first, in a way of prayer; and next, in a way of promise: and their prophetic reference to Christ is plainly and incontrovertibly declared: "Arise, O Lord, into thy rest; thou, and the ark of thy strength. Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy: for thy servant David's sake turn not away the face of thine anointed. *The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne*ⁱ."

What, then, in this sense of the passage, is the desire here expressed? It is simply this: "Come, O blessed Lord, and dwell in thy house, as thou hast promised!" Thou hast said, "Wherever two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them:" and again, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." Let it now be seen that thou art with us: "manifest thyself unto us, as thou dost not unto the world:" and let it be clearly shewn, by the mighty working of thy power upon our souls, that we are indeed thy people!]

^e Heb. ix. 4, 5. 1 Pet. i. 12.

^f Luke i. 32, 33.

^g Isai. lv. 3.

^h Acts xiii. 34.

ⁱ Ps. cxxxii. 8—11. and 13—16. In this Psalm the *Incarnation* of Christ is specified: in the two preceding passages, the *Resurrection*. If this subject were taken for a *Christmas-day* or an *Easter-day*, those citations which are the *most appropriate* should, of course, be *most insisted on*. As applied in a general way to the *reign of Christ*, they are equally proper; both of them being accomplishments of the same prophecy.

The blessings we may expect are great, in proportion to the excellency of the dispensation under which we live—

[What ministers may we not hope to find in the Christian Church, instructed as they are in the great mystery of redemption, and commissioned as they are to proclaim salvation to men through the sacrifice of their incarnate God! If “they who bare the vessels of the Lord,” under the Jewish dispensation, were required to “be clean;” much more should they be holy, and “clothed with righteousness,” who go forth as ambassadors from God, and stand in the very place of Christ, to preach the word of reconciliation to a guilty world^k. And what ought our people to be? What may we not expect from them who are thus divinely taught, and who have all “the unsearchable riches of Christ imparted to them?” We are told, that, “by comprehending with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of Christ, we are to be filled with all the fulness of God^l,” and therefore we may well expect that those who, through the ministry of the Gospel, are led into the knowledge of these incomprehensible mysteries, will “rejoice in all this goodness,” yea, “rejoice in it with a joy that is unspeakable and glorified.” Certainly, the fruit of the Gospel should exceed that of the Law: for so are we taught in Scripture to expect, that “the light of the moon in our day should be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun seven-fold^m.” “Behold,” says God, “I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad, and rejoice for ever, in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy: and I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of cryingⁿ.” This, then, Brethren, is the blessedness I desire for you: and I pray God that all of us, both priest and people, may so walk, as to approve ourselves to Him, who assumed our nature, and *tabernacled* amongst us^o, and laid down his life for us.]

To IMPROVE this subject, I would add,

1. Let us consecrate our souls to God, as his temple—

[Glorious as the Temple of Solomon was, and greatly as God honoured it by his presence, I hesitate not to say, that it was contemptible, in comparison of an abode which you may

^k 2 Cor. v. 20.

^l Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^m Isai. xxx. 26.

ⁿ Isai. lxxv. 17—19.

^o John i. 14. *ἐσκήνωσεν*.

offer him in a broken and contrite spirit^p — — — The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will come and take up their residence within you, Brethren, if you will but open the door of your hearts, and implore of them this high honour^q. And what holiness and happiness you shall then possess, I need not say. Let every one of you seek this honour; and not one of you shall be disappointed of his hope — — —]

2. Let us plead with him his great and precious promises—

[Solomon entreats of God to “remember the mercies promised to David.” Thus take you every promise contained in God's blessed word; and spread it before him. He bids you “put him in remembrance, and declare your affiance in him^r.” And if you do this, you shall be constrained to acknowledge, as Joshua after an experience of fourscore years acknowledged, that not one of all the things which God has promised to you has ever failed^s — — —]

^p Isai. lvii. 15. and lvi. 1, 2.

^q John xiv. 23.

^r Isai. xliii. 26.

^s Josh. xxiii. 14.

CCCXCIX.

GOD'S REGARD FOR HIS OWN HOUSE.

2 Chron. vii. 15, 16. *Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place. For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.*

NEVER, from the foundation of the world, was there so magnificent a structure as Solomon's Temple, or so imposing a scene as that which took place at the dedication of it^a — — — The prayer which Solomon offered on that occasion was no less remarkable: in point of humility and fervour and propriety, nothing could exceed it. The answer also that was given to it was singularly encouraging. Compare the petition to which my text refers, with the answer given to it in the text itself: “Now, my God, let, I beseech thee, thine eyes be open, and let thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place^b.”

^a This may be briefly described, ver. 12.

^b 2 Chron. vi. 40.

These very words does God repeat to him in a way of promise, and with great additional force: "Mine eyes *shall* be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place: for now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that my name may be there for ever: *and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.*"

These words will afford me a fit occasion to shew,

I. The regard which God bears to his house—

We marvel at the condescension of Almighty God, when he says, "Mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." But he regarded that structure, and he regards every place that is built for his more immediate service,

1. As the house where he will more especially reside—

[The whole land of Israel was dear to him in this view. Moses says of it, "It is a land which the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year^c." But this house was his more peculiar residence: "his name was put there^d." He was invited by Solomon to come and take possession of it: "Arise, O Lord, into thy resting-place, thou, and the ark of thy strength^e!" And, in answer to his request, he came down visibly and abode within it: "Now, when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because *the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's house^f*." To this event the Psalmist refers, when he says, "The Lord hath chosen Zion: he hath desired it for his habitation: This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it^g." Hence it may well be said, that "God loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob^h."]]

2. As the theatre where he will display his glory—

[In the temple were displayed, *under types and shadows*, all the wonders of redeeming love. The sacrifices that were offered, the consuming of them upon the altar, the carrying

^c Deut. xi. 12.

^d Deut. xii. 11. with 2 Chron. vi. 5, 6.

^e 2 Chron. vi. 41.

^f ver. 1, 2.

^g Ps. cxxxii. 14, 15.

^h Ps. lxxxvii. 2.

of their blood within the vail to sprinkle the mercy-seat of the Most High, the offering of incense also before the mercy-seat, all prefigured the atoning sacrifice, and the prevailing intercession of the Lord Jesus, through which every sinner in the universe may find acceptance with God. The whole of the services there offered were "a shadow of good things to come¹:" and in the temple alone were they suffered to exist. But now are the same things declared *plainly and explicitly* by every servant of the Most High that is called to preach the Gospel of Christ. Yes, every minister that is taught of God proclaims this truth: "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners^k." And though this message may be greatly diversified in *the mode* of its delivery, it is in substance the same with all: for every faithful minister "determines, with the Apostle, to know nothing among his people save Jesus Christ and him crucified^l." And where is this mystery unfolded, but in the house of God? True, the house of God is pre-eminently "the house of prayer;" but it is also the place where "the glory of God is displayed as shining forth in the face of Jesus Christ," and a free salvation is proclaimed to all the sinners of mankind.]

3. 'As the throne from whence he will dispense his blessings—

[To the temple of old, every sinner brought his offering: and from thence he departed with a comfortable hope that he was accepted of his God. And say, Brethren, whether you have not found God in this place, ready to hear and answer your most enlarged petitions? Have you not found the word, that was delivered in the Saviour's name, "quick, and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword?" Has it not brought conviction to your minds; and been effectual, also, to administer consolation to your souls? Has not grace been administered by means of it? and have you not found it a channel of communication to your souls, insomuch that you have here "drunk as of rivers of water," and "feasted, as it were, upon fat things," that have nourished your souls unto life eternal? Yes verily, God has said that he would "beautify the place of his sanctuary, and make the place of his feet glorious^m;" and in these divine communications his own soul, no less than the souls of his people, has been refreshed, and filled with joyⁿ.]

From the regard which God bears to his house, we see,

¹ Heb. x. 1.

^k 1 Tim. i. 15.

^l 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^m Isai. lx. 13.

ⁿ Jer. xxxii. 41. Zeph. iii. 17.

II. The feeling which we also should have towards it—

Are God's "eyes and heart upon his house perpetually?" Then we also should regard it,

1. With a reverential sense of its sanctity—

[I readily grant, that there is not the same *measure* of sanctity in holy buildings and in holy vessels now, that there was under the Mosaic economy, where "Touch not, taste not, handle not," constituted so great a part of the divine Law. But, on the other hand, there is an immense distance between things sacred and things common: nor is there any person of real piety who would willingly break down this distinction. It is possible, I grant, for this idea to be carried to an extreme of superstition: but it is equally possible for it to be spurned at in a way of grievous impiety. Different usages may prevail in different places, in perfect consistency with a becoming reverence for the house of God: but what our blessed Lord did in driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple, may serve to shew us, that what has been consecrated to God ought not to be turned to a profane use: and more especially, whilst it is acknowledged as the place which God delights to honour with his peculiar presence, it should be approached with reverence; and, in the spirit of our minds at least, we should "put off our shoes, when we tread on such holy ground:" for God has expressly and most authoritatively said, "Thou shalt reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord^o."]]

2. With gratitude for mercies there received—

[Methinks, of some of you it may be said, that "you were born there^p." And what a blessing is this! In comparison of it, the whole world is lighter than the dust upon the balance. Call to mind how ignorant you once were of those things which belong to your everlasting peace. Once you knew not what guilt you had contracted in the sight of God, and to what tremendous judgments you were exposed. You knew not what provision God had made for you in his Gospel. The necessity of an atonement; the suitableness and sufficiency of the atonement which Christ has made; the nature of a life of faith on Christ; the work and offices of the Holy Spirit; the beauty and excellency of holiness; these, and a variety of other things, were altogether unknown to you, till you heard them in this place, and God "opened the eyes of your understanding to understand them." Only call to mind what a load of guilt has been removed from your souls; what peace and

^o Lev. xix. 30.

^p Ps. lxxxvii. 4.

joy have flowed in upon you through the preached word; what strength has been imparted to you to resist temptations, and to fulfil your duties to the Lord; and, finally, what anticipations and foretastes of your heavenly inheritance you have here enjoyed; and you will not regard with indifference the very spot where such mercies have been vouchsafed unto you; but will be ready to say, "If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not that Jerusalem above my chief joy^a."]

3. With desire for yet further blessings—

[To our latest hour shall we need yet further blessings from the Lord. As all the males of the land came up to the temple thrice every year to offer their accustomed offerings, so we must still come up to the house of God, to renew our supplications at the throne of his grace, and to receive from him such communications as our necessities require. Even when at a distance from the temple, the Jews looked towards it with a view to express more fully their faith and hope in the God of Israel: and so should we, not indeed to any individual edifice, but to the house of God where his people are assembled; "panting after it as the hart after the water-brooks, and saying, When shall I come and appear before God?" It should be a comfort to us to reflect how often we have in past times "gone up with the multitude to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise"; and we should long to have those opportunities renewed, that God may yet again be glorified in us, and that the whole work of his grace may be perfected within us.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. As members of the great community, let your expectations be enlarged—

["When did God ever say to any, Seek ye my face in vain?" No indeed; "God delighteth in the prayer of the upright:" not a sigh shall pass unnoticed by him^t, or a look be directed towards him, without some special token of his regard^a. "Only draw nigh to him, and you never need fear but that he will draw nigh to you^x."]

2. As individual believers, assure yourselves that God will not overlook you—

[Did God so regard the Temple of Solomon? Know, that ye who believe in Christ are far more acceptable temples than that. Whilst that was yet standing in all its glory, God

^a Ps. cxxxvii. 6.

^t Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

^s Ps. xlii. 4.

^t Ps. xii. 5.

^u Ps. xxxiv. 5.

^x Jam. iv. 8.

poured contempt upon it in comparison of "a poor and contrite spirit." Yes, "to a contrite sinner he will look" with complacency^a; and "in him will he dwell, as in his temple^a." Towards him "his ears shall be attent;" and on him shall be fixed "his eyes and his heart perpetually." Know, then, your privilege, my beloved Brethren; and value as you ought the honour thus accorded to you.]

^y Isai. lxvi. 1, 2.

^a Isai. lvii. 15.

^a 2 Cor. vi. 16.

CCCC.

THE DUTY OF PROTESTANTS.

2 Chron. xi. 13, 16. *And the Priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts — — — And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers.*

IN this age of Revolutions^a, it may be well to turn our attention to perhaps the greatest, speediest, completest and least sanguinary revolution that is recorded in the annals of the whole world. The empire of Solomon, if not large in extent, was exceeding powerful: but no sooner was he removed from it, than his son, instead of conciliating the regards of his subjects, disgusted them with the most insulting menaces, and drove them, in utter desperation, to revolt. Far the larger half of his people, even ten tribes out of twelve, formed themselves into a separate and independent state; and continued, throughout all successive periods of their existence, not only an independent, but an hostile nation. To enter into any discussion about the rights of the different parties, would be altogether foreign to our purpose, and to the occasion for which we are assembled: though we cannot refrain from expressing our most unqualified reprobation of Rehoboam's folly, in listening to the extravagant counsels of his young friends, instead of following the sage advice of the elders. But, in a

^a In 1822, after the attempted Revolutions in Italy, and in the midst of those in South America, and the commotions in Spain and Portugal, and in Greece.

religious view, this revolution was pregnant with consequences of the most important nature. Jeroboam, in order to keep his new subjects from going up to Jerusalem to worship according to the Law of Moses, set up golden calves in Dan and Beth-el, that the people might worship *them*, or, perhaps, that they might worship Jehovah *in* and *through* them. Having appointed a new worship, he appointed new priests to officiate in it, excluding of course from that service all the ministers of Jehovah. What now must be done throughout all his dominions? Shall the godly conform to this idolatry? No: a schism was instantly created: and all the godly in the land, whether Clergy or Laity, forsook their country, and united themselves to the worshippers of Jehovah in Jerusalem; entering thus their solemn *protest* against the abominations which had been introduced.

Now this will lead me to set before you,

I. The conduct of Protestants in that day—

It was not on account of some trifling regulations about non-essential matters, that they withdrew themselves, but on account of the utter subversion of their religion, and the establishment of idolatry in its stead. Nor did they rise up in rebellion against the government, or attempt to maintain their religion with the sword. They peaceably withdrew; and sought to enjoy in another country the blessings of which they were deprived in their own. Their conduct was altogether such as became the servants of the Most High:—

1. They bore their testimony against the reigning abominations—

[Of all the clergy of the land, we read not of so much as one who consented to renounce his principles for filthy lucre sake. A noble example this! and nobly followed, too, by all the godly of the land! for it is said, "*After them*," that is, *after their example*, "out of all the tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem." It is probable that they had no hope of effecting any thing by remonstrance: but here was a testimony far more decisive than any mere remonstrance could be. It was open and

visible to all; and could not but produce a very great sensation through the land. It spoke, in fact, so loudly and intelligibly, as to leave the whole nation without excuse.]

2. They adhered steadfastly to the service of their God—

[It is said, “they came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers.” It was by sacrifice only that they could approach their God: and it was in the temple only that the sacrifices could be offered. Thither, then, they would go. Nothing should detain them from thence. They would not willingly offend man: but they were determined not to neglect their God. His honour and his authority were, in their minds, considerations of paramount importance: and, if enjoined to worship any other God, or to refrain from serving him, their answer was, “Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.”]

3. They renounced all for conscience sake—

[The priests left their cities, their suburbs, their possessions, and abandoned all for conscience sake. The people, too, even all the godly of the land, forsook their all, that they might approve themselves faithful to their God. This was a severe test of their integrity: but their piety was equal to the occasion. And though, in individual instances, we may certainly find much greater sacrifices for conscience sake, yet perhaps, on so large a scale, this was never equalled in any country under heaven.]

But let us pass on to what more immediately concerns ourselves, namely,

II. Our duty, as Protestants, at the present day—

The abominations of Popery are scarcely more tolerable than those which Jeroboam established. And it is a mercy to us that our forefathers had courage and piety enough to protest against them.

But we have our duties also to perform—

1. We should realize our own religious principles—

[To what purpose do we renounce the superstitions of the Romish Church, whilst we hold fast the greatest and most fundamental error of all, the doctrine of human merit? I grant that we do not maintain this error in the same open, gross, and avowed way in which it is held by the Papists: but on the subject of salvation by faith alone we have all the same jealousies as they. Yes, though Protestants by profession, the great mass of us are looking for salvation by our own

repentances or reformatations, rather than by the simple exercise of faith in Christ. In the ministry of the word, instead of bringing forward the great doctrine of justification by faith alone, as that which is universally admitted, approved, and gloried in, we are forced to make a thousand apologies, in order to ward off from ourselves the imputation of being Antinomians and heretics. O Brethren! it should not be thus. We ought all to rejoice that we are emancipated from the bonds in which Popery holds its deluded votaries, and to glory in the Lord Jesus Christ as all our salvation and all our desire — — —]

2. We should shew their superior efficacy to sanctify the heart and life—

[There have been doubtless many eminently pious men in the Church of Rome: but they were pious *in despite of* their errors. So far as they were influenced by superstition, their piety was debased, rather than advanced. Christianity gives liberty to the soul, instead of reducing it to a state of bondage: and, if we possess that liberty, it should elevate us to a higher and nobler course than can be attained by the servile principles of Popery. Papists *withdraw* altogether from the world: *we*, whilst *in* the world, should shew ourselves *above* it; “dead to” its cares, and “crucified to” its allurements. They, in order to mortify the flesh, have recourse to absurd and self-tormenting usages, which, whilst they lacerate the body, puff up the soul with pride and self-applause. We must seek the elevation of the soul in high and holy affections, “having our conversation in heaven,” and delighting ourselves in God — — —]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are conforming to this vain world—

[Behold the conduct of the pious Israelites, and blush. *They*, for the honour of their God, forsook all that they possessed: and if you, either from the love of the world, or from the fear of man, are averse to make this sacrifice for your Lord and Saviour, glory not in being Protestants; but seek to become Christians: for on no other terms than these will Christ ever acknowledge you as his disciples^b — — —]

2. Those who, like the Israelites, are “setting their hearts fully to seek the Lord their God”—

[No man ever repented of “following the Lord fully.” Such persons may have less of this world; and may at times be reduced to great necessities, even as the Apostle Paul was

^b Luke xiv. 33.

on different occasions. But the presence of God with their souls, and the testimony of a good conscience, will amply compensate for all the losses they can sustain, and for all the evils they can suffer, in so good a cause. Even in this present life will those who give up their all for Christ, "receive in return an hundred-fold^c:" but what they shall reap in the eternal world, who can tell? Ask those who are now in heaven, "whither they came out of great tribulations^d," whether they have ever for one instant regretted the sacrifices they made for the Lord: and take for your own comfort the testimony which you feel well assured you would, without one single exception, receive from them.]

^c Mark x. 29, 30.

^d Rev. vii. 14—17.

CCCCI.

HUMILIATION THE MEANS OF DELIVERANCE.

2 Chron. xii. 7. *And when the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them.*

REPENTANCE is so plain and acknowledged a duty, that it is never unseasonable to call men to the performance of it: whilst, on the other hand, so great are our encouragements to it, that we rather account it a privilege than a duty. The instances wherein God has recorded his condescension to penitents of old time, are almost numberless: the one before us, even if there were no other, would of itself be sufficient to encourage all, whether nations or individuals, to abase themselves before him, and to seek his favour with an assurance that they should not seek it in vain.

For the space of three years Rehoboam continued to walk in the ways of David and of Solomon^a. But having, as he thought, strengthened himself against all assault from foreign enemies, "he forsook the law of the Lord, as did all Israel together with him^b." For this great defection God stirred up Shishak king of Egypt to come forth against him with a large

^a 2 Chron. xi. 17.

^b ver. 1.

army. Shishak doubtless was of himself willing enough to invade a country which offered the prospect of such abundant spoil as Jerusalem did at that time: but, though unconscious of any foreign agency, he was only an instrument in God's hands, sent forth to punish the transgressions of revolted Israel^c. Success attended the invading army in all their movements; the fenced cities all successively fell into their hands; and at last Jerusalem itself became their prey. In less than five short years was all the wealth which David and Solomon had treasured up in the temple and in the king's house, swept away, and delivered over as a spoil to a victorious enemy. And now would Jerusalem itself also have been utterly destroyed, if the arm of justice had not been arrested by the penitential cries of Rehoboam and his nobles. God had sent a prophet to declare to them the grounds and reasons of the judgments that were now inflicted on them: and they, seeing that all other hope had failed them, betook themselves to repentance. To this God had respect, as our text informs us; and, on seeing their repentance, he sent the same prophet to assure them, that he would suspend his uplifted arm, and forbear to execute upon them his judgments according to the full measure of their deserts.

Now from the message which was sent them from the Lord we may properly observe,

I. That sin will surely bring the judgments of God upon us—

[It matters not by whom sin is committed; for all are equally amenable to the laws of God, and must stand on an equal footing at the bar of judgment. Kings and princes are in this respect on a level with the lowest of mankind: for "with God is no respect of persons."

Nor must we imagine that those sins only which are of greater enormity in our eyes will be noticed by God: for he notices the violations of the first table, as well as of the second; and those of defect as well as those of actual transgression. The sum of the two tables is, that "we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind,

^c ver. 2.

and strength; and our neighbour as ourselves:" and it will be to little purpose, that we have not bowed down to strange gods, if we have withheld from Jehovah the entire devotion of our souls; or that we have not injured our neighbour by the open crimes of adultery and murder, if we have withheld from him those holy exercises of brotherly affection which God has made his due. Sins of omission must be accounted for, as well as those of commission: and not one escapes the notice of the heart-searching God.

Our iniquities, because committed long ago, may be forgotten by us: but not one of them is forgotten by God: they are all recorded in the book of his remembrance: and the precise measure of "wrath" that is due to each "is treasured up," against the day that the vials of God's wrath shall be poured out upon the whole world. Every sin leaves a stain behind it: and as the hunted stag, though far removed from the sight or hearing of his pursuers, is traced by them till he is overtaken and destroyed, so will the sinner be by the judgments of the Most High; according as it is said, "*Evil shall hunt the wicked man, to overthrow him.*" Yes, to every sinner under heaven must it be said, "*Be sure your sin will find you out.*"

Nor is there any possibility of escape, but by repentance; since God has ordained,

II. That sin, in order to its being forgiven, must be repented of—

["God has commanded all men everywhere to repent:" and has declared, that, "except we repent, we must all perish."

But let it not be thought that repentance is a mere light and transient emotion: no indeed: repentance is a far different thing from what is generally supposed. It must be general, not relating to some few particular acts, but to the state and habit of our souls throughout our whole lives. It must also be deep, like that of the publican, leading us to smite on our breasts with deep contrition, and to cry for mercy as the most unworthy of mankind. One thing in particular we notice in Rehoboam and the princes; they acknowledged, that "God was righteous" in all that he had brought upon them^d. And till we also are brought ingenuously and from our inmost souls to acknowledge, that he may justly enter into judgment with us, and consign our souls over to everlasting perdition, we are not truly penitent: we see not our own demerit: we virtually deny God's right to punish us: we are proud, unhumbled, unsubdued.

^d ver. 6.

Our penitence must also lead us to cast ourselves altogether upon God's promised mercy in Christ Jesus. This it is which constitutes the difference between that "repentance which is unto salvation," and which is "never to be repented of," and that repentance which will fall short of salvation, and leave room for everlasting penitence in the world to come. If our hope terminate on any thing short of the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have not yet learned the extent of our fall, or the impossibility of being saved by any name but his.]

It is, however, no little consolation to know,

III. That sin, truly repented of, shall assuredly be forgiven—

[How delightful the evidence of this in the passage before us! God sends his servant to announce to his penitent people his compassion towards them, and his readiness to forgive; expressly grounding his forgiveness on the penitence which they had evinced. And where shall we find any instance of penitence despised, or of judgments inflicted on one who with sincerity of heart implored mercy at God's hands? We will take an instance of one whose crimes perhaps exceeded those of any other individual from the foundation of the world,—the idolatrous, and murderous Manasseh. He, like Rehoboam and his courtiers, thought not of repentance, till he was reduced, as it were, to the lowest ebb of misery: but even then his cry was heard; and his supplication entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts*. So, if we be truly penitent, whatever may have been the extent of our iniquity, it shall be forgiven. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon†." Only let us "repent and turn ourselves from all our transgressions, and then iniquity shall not be our ruin‡." Though "our sins have been many, they shall be forgiven‡;" and "where sin has abounded, the grace of our God shall much more abound!"]

And now permit me to institute a most important INQUIRY—

[Respecting Rehoboam and the princes, it is said, "God saw that they humbled themselves:" and of this God testified, saying, "They *have* humbled themselves." Now then I ask, Can he bear the same testimony respecting you? Has he seen

* 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11—13.

† Luke vii. 47.

† Isai. lv. 7. § Ezek. xviii. 30

‡ Rom. v. 20.

you weeping in secret on account of your multiplied iniquities? Can he say of you as he does of Ephraim, "Surely I have heard Ephraim bemoaning himself;" and can he, as he did in Ephraim's case, rehearse the very language of your lips and hearts, and attest your every motion, whether of body or mind, as indicating the depth and sincerity of your repentance^k? — — — Call to mind the time, the place, the occasion — — — Say whether it arose only out of some particular circumstances, or whether it be the stated habit of your mind? Were this indeed the general frame of your souls, we would congratulate you, assured that God has already said concerning you, "Is not Ephraim my dear son? Is he not a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord^l." There can be no doubt respecting any "one who thus sows in tears, that he shall soon reap in joy^m."

But respecting too many of you, must not the testimony of God be the very reverse of this? Must not the heart-searching God say respecting the generality,—'I have seen in them no repentance at all. I have seen them agitated times without number on account of earthly things: I have seen them angry, when offended; and grieved, when they have suffered loss: but I have never seen them angry at themselves for offending me, nor bemoaning, as they should have done, the loss of their own souls. If you were to form your estimate from what has been seen in them, you must conclude, that sin is no great evil; that repentance on account of it is of no urgent necessity; and that acceptance with me is not worth the trouble of it'—? Must he not further testify respecting some, 'I have seen their parents, yea, and their minister too, weeping over them; but have never seen them weeping for themselves'—?

Now, Brethren, it is to little purpose for you to say, "I have repented," unless "your sorrow has been of a godly sort:" for you will not be judged by what you are pleased to call repentance, but by the standard of God's blessed word: it is by that that God forms his estimate of you now; and by that will you be judged in the last day. "Judge yourselves therefore now, that ye may not be judged of the Lord." If it were only such a destruction as impended over Jerusalem, that were about to come upon you, methinks I would be content to let you "sleep on and take your rest:" but, when I reflect that it is an "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," I tremble at the thought of

^k Jer. xxxi. 18, 19.

^l Jer. xxxi. 20.

^m Ps. cxxvi. 5.

your exposure to it, and of its being the doom to which you are so soon to be consigned.

Begin then this necessary work, ere it be too late — — — Consider God as now calling you to it by me, as he called his people of old by the Prophet Shemaiah^a — — — and never cease to abase yourselves before him, till he shall have said concerning you, “I have seen his ways, and will heal him, and will restore comfort to him and to his mourners^c,” for you may be assured, that, if now you “are afflicted, and mourn, and weep; if your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into heaviness, so that you humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, he will lift you up in due time^b,” he will say, “Deliver him from going down into the pit; for I have found and accepted a ransom for him^c.”]

^a If this be a subject for a *Fast-Day* on account of ill success in war, or any other calamity, a parallel may here be drawn between that and the afflictions specified in the context.

^b Isai. lvii. 18. ^c Jam. iv. 9, 10. ^c Job xxxiii. 27, 28.

CCCCII.

THE EVIL OF NEGLECTING PRAYER.

2 Chron. xii. 14. *He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.*

IF we were to judge by the conduct of all around us, we should suppose that religion required no effort; and that eternal happiness was to be acquired in a neglect of all the means which God has appointed for the attainment of it. But “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.” The means are closely connected with the end. Even in earthly things, wealth is, *for the most part*, the fruit of diligence; and poverty the result of idleness: but in spiritual things it may be said invariably, that “he who soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and that he who soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully.” Of King Rehoboam we are informed, that there were hopeful appearances at the beginning, since “for three years he and his people walked in the way of David and Solomon^a,” but

^a 2 Chron. xi. 17.

“when he was established in his kingdom, he forsook the Law of the Lord, and all Israel with him^b.” From that period “he did evil:” which melancholy change is here accounted for: “He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord.”

From this conduct of his I will take occasion to shew,

I. How alone man can be preserved from evil—

It is “by seeking after God;” yet not simply by that, but by “preparing the heart to seek him.” Now this implies,

1. Meditation—

[A man can never prevail against sin, if he do not give himself to serious meditation upon the concerns of his soul. He must consider the end for which he has been sent into the world; the responsibility of his soul for the use of those means which God has appointed for his happiness; and, above all, the great wonders of redemption, whereby alone a fallen creature can ever obtain mercy with an offended God — — — It is in this way only that he can get his mind into a proper frame for prosecuting the work which God has given him to do.]

2. Self-examination—

[It is necessary that we obtain correct views of our own state before God. And for this end we must compare ourselves, not with those around us, but with God's revealed will, which alone will bring us to a just estimate of our own character. Persons of different ages, and under different circumstances, have peculiar temptations, and peculiar failings: and it is by searching out, each his own peculiar weaknesses and faults, that any real humiliation can be produced, or any clear perception of the evils to which we are most exposed. Without such a knowledge of our own hearts, we cannot “seek God” with effect. Then only, when we know our own sins, can we deplore them as we ought, or plead for mercy as we ought from our offended God.]

3. Fixedness of heart to follow the dictates of our conscience—

[The word “prepared” is, in the marginal translation, “fixed.” Now there must be in us a fixed purpose to renounce sin, and a determination, through grace, to surrender up ourselves entirely to God in newness of heart and life

^b ver. 1.

— — — Without this fixedness of purpose, we shall vacillate between sin and duty, and never become steadfast in the ways of God.]

We may therefore easily foresee,

II. The certain consequence of neglecting the appointed means—

We shall “do evil,” and continue to do it even to the end. As long as we neglect to seek after God,

1. Our corruptions will rage—

[“The heart of every man is full of evil.” Our corruptions may vary according to our age or condition in life: but our besetting sins, whatever they may be, will gather strength. A fire, if not checked, will produce a conflagration, as long as there are any materials to burn. And our corruptions, if suffered to remain unmortified, will burn even to the lowest hell. There is in every man “a spiritual, as well as a fleshly, filthiness:” and both the one and the other will overspread the whole man, even like a leprosy, though under different forms, according to the dispositions and habits of every different individual.]

2. Our temptations will multiply—

[Men, if they turn not to God, will frequent those scenes which most amuse them, and that company which is most in accordance with their taste. Their pursuits will all be of such a nature as shall tend rather to confirm, than to eradicate, the corruptions of their hearts: and thus they will be working out their own damnation from day to day, even as a child of God is daily “working out his salvation.” What but ruin can proceed from such a course?]

3. Our enemies will prevail—

[Satan is a great adversary, whom we are commanded to oppose: and a divine panoply is provided for us, that we may be able to withstand him. But if we put not on our armour, how can we hope to vanquish him? He will “lead us captive at his will,” yea, “as a roaring lion he will devour us.”]

Get then your minds deeply imbued with,

1. A sense of your weakness—

[It is impossible to have too deep a sense of our incapacity for what is good. To be “as a little child” is almost the summit of human attainment. And, strange as it may appear, you “never are so truly strong, as when you are thus weak:” for then will God interpose for you, and “perfect his own strength in your weakness.”]

2. A persuasion of the efficacy of prayer—

[If we really believed that our prayers would be answered, methinks we should be urging our requests all the day long. Observe, in the Scriptures, God's answers to prayer, how marked! how speedy! how effectual! Verily, "however wide we might open our mouths, God would fill them:" and all that he did for the Lord Jesus Christ corporeally, in raising him from the dead, and setting him at his own right hand above all the principalities and powers of heaven, he would do mystically and spiritually in us^c, and "make us more than conquerors through Him who loved us."]

3. A conviction of the necessity of holiness in order to your happiness in the eternal world—

[To "do evil," and continue in it, can issue in nothing but destruction. "Christ came to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Let, I pray you, the end of his grace be answered in this way: and never cease to plead with him, till he has "delivered you from all evil," and "bruised Satan himself under your exulting and triumphant feet."]

^c Eph. i. 19—22. with ii. 4—7.

CCCCIII.

ABIJAH'S REMONSTRANCE WITH JEROBOAM^a.

2 Chron. xiii. 12. *Behold, God himself is with us for our captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper.*

GOOD advice should be attended to, by whomsoever it may be given. Our blessed Lord particularly inculcated this on his disciples, commanding them to do whatever those who sat in Moses' chair required of them, without regarding the moral character of the persons themselves, or refusing compliance with what was good, because it was not exemplified in the conduct of their instructors. The words before us were not spoken by a good man; for Abijah was on the whole a wicked king^b: but they contain very sound instruction, and have a

^a For a *Fast-Day* in war.

^b 1 Kings xv. 3.

semblance even of piety itself. The whole address indeed was well fitted for the occasion, though it certainly savours much of that partiality, which is found in almost all who plead their own cause. There is undoubtedly a good deal of false colouring in what he speaks to the disparagement of his enemies, though there is ground for his assertions, if they had been more carefully expressed and more duly qualified. Notwithstanding Abijah had invaded Jeroboam's country, in order to make that, rather than his own country, the seat of war, we think it probable that Jeroboam was the aggressor; because the address of Abijah was altogether of a pacific nature. It seems from the words of our text that he laboured hard to prevent the effusion of blood: and if his adversary had been like-minded with himself, the dispute might perhaps have been amicably adjusted.

We shall consider the words of our text,

I. In reference to the contest then pending between Judah and Israel—

Abijah's address was certainly striking and judicious—

[Abijah contrasts the usurpation and idolatry of Jeroboam with the legitimate claims of his own family, and their continued adherence to the God of their fathers^c — — — and doubtless these were just grounds for hope, that God would espouse his cause: for though it may please God for a season to let the ungodly triumph over his people, yet we believe, that, as a righteous Governor, he will ultimately favour the cause of righteousness and truth.

Well did the Israelites know, that there could be no effectual resistance to the Lord of Hosts, especially when those who were under his command were observant of the laws appointed for them. Hence, when Abijah told his adversaries, that he was come forth in dependence on God's aid, and in a strict observance of his commands^d, they had reason to tremble for themselves, and to refrain from prosecuting the contest any further. True indeed, a hypocrite may make all these pretensions, even as Rabshakeh did in his address to Hezekiah's servants^e: but

^c ver. 4—11.

^d Numb. x. 9. This passage reflects much light on the text.

^e Isai. xxxvi. 10.

where the dependence is real, and the obedience true, a successful issue may justly be expected.]

The event justified his expectations—

[Whilst Abijah was endeavouring to avert the conflict, Jeroboam sought by stratagem to overwhelm him and all his followers. He placed in ambush a considerable portion of his army, and attacked Abijah both in front and rear. But Abijah “cried unto the Lord; and the priests sounded with their trumpets; and the men of Judah gave a shout,” expressive of their confidence in God: and immediately the hosts of Israel turned their backs; and, though they were twice as numerous as their enemies, no less than five hundred thousand of them fell down slain before the victorious hosts of Judah. Never was there such a slaughter in one single battle, either before or since: and the event of that day fully proves, that they who fight for God have nothing to fear; nor they who fight against him, to hope^f — — —]

Taking the text in somewhat of an accommodated sense, we will proceed to consider it,

II. In reference to the contest now pending between God and us—

There is a contest now existing between God and sinners—

[By every sin that men commit, they do indeed “fight against God” — — — What shall we say of those who cast off their allegiance to the God of Israel; who bow down to idols of their own creation; who disregard the word and ordinances of their God; and who seek only to wound and destroy those who warn them of their guilt and danger? Are not they avowed enemies to God? They are: their own reason may tell them so: the Scriptures universally declare it: justify themselves as they may, their excuses are all vain; and they only deceive their own souls — — —]

“Suffer ye then the word of exhortation”—

[“O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers!” We are appointed of God to “blow the trumpet of alarm against you;” and we must blow it, at the peril of our own souls: we must “lift up our voice as a trumpet, and shew you both your sin” and danger^g. It is against God, even “the Captain of our salvation” himself, that you are fighting: it is his majesty that you oppose, his law you

^f Ezek. xxii. 14. with Rom. viii. 31.

^g Isai. lviii. 1.

trample on, his mercy you despise, and his salvation you reject — — — O think with yourselves, Can you prosper? "Did ever any harden themselves against him and prosper^b?" No indeed; "it is in vain to kick against the pricks:" "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished^c."]]

APPLICATION—

1. From the former view of this subject, we may learn how to obtain the blessing of God upon our arms—

[It is not by confidence in an arm of flesh that we can hope to prevail, but by an humble trust in God. It is said, "The children of Israel prevailed, *because they relied upon the Lord God of their fathers*^k." Notwithstanding the numbers and the stratagems of their enemies, they prevailed, because God himself fought for them. Let us then by prayer and supplication call God to our aid, and rest assured that he will interpose for us in the hour of necessity.

Whilst indeed we trust in him for success, we must use every effort for the attainment of peace: but if our adversary will not listen to reasonable terms, then may we go forth with confidence against him, knowing that "with God it is alike easy to save by many or by few."]

2. From the latter view of this subject we may learn how to escape the destruction to which we are exposed—

[Our God "has made ready his glittering spear;" and he has already said, "Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies^l." What then shall we do? Shall we continue the contest? What would this be, but to "set briers and thorns in battle against the devouring fire, which would go through them, and burn them up together^m?" No: let us throw down our weapons of rebellion against him, and cast ourselves on the multitude of his tender mercies: let us go, like Benhadad, "with ropes round our necks, and sackcloth on our loins," and confess our desert of his heavier judgments. Then will he "turn from his fierce anger," and be reconciled towards us: yea, "he will be merciful to our transgressions, and our sins and iniquities will he remember no more."]

^b Job ix. 4.^l Prov. xi. 21.^k ver. 18.^c Isai. i. 24.^m Isai. xxvii. 4.

CCCCIV.

THE EQUITY OF THE DIVINE PROCEDURE.

2 Chron. xv. 2. *And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.*

AS in a season of affliction it may be sometimes necessary to blend reproof with consolation, so in a season of joy and triumph it may sometimes be proper to temper our congratulations with prudential advice. When Asa was returning with his victorious army after the destruction of his Ethiopian enemies, the prophet Oded was sent forth to meet him, and was directed by God himself not to salute him with fulsome compliments, but to impress upon his mind a salutary admonition.

In this concise and pointed address, we see,

I. The rule of God's procedure—

God is not necessarily bound by any rules; for he both may do, and actually “does, according to his own will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth:” yet has he been pleased to prescribe rules to himself,

1. In the dispensations of his providence—

[The Jews, as God's peculiar people, were governed by him according to the strictest rules of equity. They were taught to look for temporal rewards or punishments according as they were obedient or disobedient to his word: and their whole history may serve to illustrate the correspondence there was between their dealings towards him, and his towards them^a— — — Indeed, God himself expresses peculiar jealousy on this head; and appeals to them, whether the inequality which there was in his providence, did not originate in themselves; and whether it was not perfectly agreeable to the rules which he had established for his conduct towards them^b.

^a See this exemplified in Asa, 2 Chron. xiv. 5—7, 11, 12. and xv. 10—15, 19. with xvi. 7—9; in Jehoshaphat, xvii. 3—6, 10. and xx. 3, 30. with xix. 2. and xx. 35—37; in Joash, xxiv. 20.

^b Compare Ezek. xviii. 24—29. with Lev. xxvi. 3—45. and Deut. xxxi. 16, 17.

Somewhat of the same procedure is yet visible in the dispensations of God towards us. Nations at this time are often prospered or punished according as they pay due allegiance to God, or revolt from him: and individuals not unfrequently experience even here a recompence suited to their conduct. But as, under the law, God sometimes deviated from this rule, in order to direct the views of men to a future day of retribution^c; so now he has laid it aside in a great degree, in order that our motives to action may be more spiritual, and that we may look forward to the day of judgment as the period fixed for the display of his righteousness, and for the rewarding of our actions.]

2. In the communications of his grace—

[God's conduct towards the Jews in respect of temporal things was intended to shadow forth his dealings with us in respect of spiritual things. In relation to these we may see, that the rule which God has laid down to himself is almost invariably observed. It is true, that he is often "found of them that sought him not:" but when once he has revealed himself to any man, he regulates himself towards him according to a principle of perfect equity, rewarding him for his fidelity, or punishing him for his neglect. Who amongst his people ever sought his face in vain? Who ever diligently walked with him in a state of humble dependence, and did not find God with him in the tokens of his love, and the supports of his grace? God indeed reserves in his own power the times and the seasons when he shall reveal himself more fully to the soul; and he apportions to every one such trials as he in his wisdom knows will be productive of good: but he never did, nor ever will, forsake them that seek him^d.

On the other hand, who is there that has not experienced the hidings of God's face, when fresh contracted guilt, or repeated neglect of duty, has given him offence? Who has not found on such occasions that God has withdrawn the aids of his Spirit both in public and private ordinances; and perhaps left him for a season to the power and influence of his own corruptions? We know indeed that God has said, he will not finally cast off his people^e: and we believe he will not: we believe he will "visit them with the rod" till he has brought them back to him with deep contrition^f: but as long as they forsake him, he will, as far as respects any manifestations of his favour, forsake them; and if any who have thought themselves his people, forsake him utterly, they shall also be utterly abandoned by

^c Ps. lxxiii. 3—14.

^d Ps. ix. 10.

^e 1 Sam. xii. 22. Heb. xiii. 5. Isai. liv. 7—10.

^f Ps. lxxxix. 30—35.

him. Nor can any be assured that they themselves shall not suffer eternal dereliction, any longer than their adherence to God justifies the hope that they are his children.]

To impress this rule the more deeply on our minds, let us consider,

II. The universal importance of it—

The prophet in a most solemn manner called the attention both of the king and all his army to the subject before us; intimating thereby, that there were none who were not interested in it, nor any occasion when the consideration of it would not be useful to their souls.

It is suited to us,

1. In prosperity—

[Of this there can be no doubt, since it was in a season of peculiar triumph that the prophet was sent to give this admonition. Indeed we are never more apt to forget ourselves, yea, to forget God also, than when we are elated with great prosperity. We are apt to “sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense to our own drag^g.” When “Jeshurun waxed fat, he kicked^h.” when “Uzziah was made strong, his heart was lifted up to his destructionⁱ.” Strange as it may seem, even the manifestations of God’s love to the soul are calculated to puff us up with pride, if we have not some thorn in the flesh given us to counteract this evil tendency, and to keep us from abusing the divine mercies^k. The more sail a ship carries, the more ballast it requires. The very deliverance that Asa had experienced was likely to render him careless and secure, as though he were now beyond the reach of harm. But by this admonition he was taught, that his security was in God alone, and that he must continue to “walk humbly with God,” if he would have the divine protection continued to him.

Similar admonitions are also given to us, to counteract the pride of our hearts. “Be not high-minded, but fear^l.” “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall^m.” “Blessed is the man that feareth alwaysⁿ.” Even the great Apostle himself, though he knew himself to be a chosen vessel unto God, yet felt the necessity of “keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away^o.” Let us

^g Hab. i. 16. ^h Deut. xxxii. 15. ⁱ 2 Chron. xxvi. 5, 16.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 7. ^l Rom. xi. 20, 21. ^m 1 Cor. x. 12.

ⁿ Prov. xxviii. 14. ^o 1 Cor. ix. 27.

therefore exercise the same caution; and, whether we rejoice on account of national or personal mercies, "rejoice with trembling^p."]

2. In adversity—

[As in prosperous circumstances we need to be guarded against presumption, so in heavy trials we need to be cautioned against despondency. If we appear to be forsaken of our God, we are apt to think that he has altogether "shut up his tender mercies, and will be favourable to us no more^q." But in the words before us we see, that no nation or individual can be in so low a state, but that their recovery is certain if only they wait patiently upon God. He will assuredly be found of them that seek him: yea, at the very time that they perhaps are bewailing his absence, he "*is actually present with them,*" working in them that very contrition, and enabling them to wait upon him, when their unassisted nature would have fainted in despair.

Let every one then apply to himself the text in this view. Are we ignorant? let us look to God for the teachings of his Spirit. Are we guilty? let us cry to him for remission through the blood of Christ. Are we in any strait or difficulty whatever? our way is clear; let us wait upon God in assured expectation of succour and support. This promise shall never fail us^r: though we had a *million*^s of men or devils to encounter, we should be "more than conquerors^t." "Believe in the Lord; so shall ye be established: believe his prophets; so shall ye prosper^u."] ^x

^p Ps. ii. 11.

^q Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^r Heb. xi. 6.

^s 2 Chron. xiv. 9.

^t Rom. viii. 37.

^u 2 Chron. xx. 20.

^x The subject may be further improved: 1. *For caution*; to guard against any *secret evil in the heart*, or any *remissness of duty in the life*, which may offend God. See 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. with the first clause of ver. 10. Mark this passage carefully. And, 2. *For encouragement*; since, if he be for us, we need not fear, however many there may be against us.

CCCCV.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO EXERTION.

2 Chron. xv. 7, 8. *Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded. And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage.*

THERE are two extremes to which mankind are prone—presumption, and despondency. To the

former the ungodly are inclined ; to the latter, the righteous. King Asa was a man who “did that which was good and right in the eyes of the Lord his God^a,” and “his heart was perfect all his days^b :” yet did he need encouragement from a prophet of the Lord, to sustain his fainting mind.

In the passage before us, we have,

I. An historic record—

Asa had been enabled to vanquish an host of not less than a million of Ethiopians, with an army of little more than one half their number. But in his own kingdom there was a great work to perform, a work which he despaired of ever being able to accomplish. God, however, mercifully sent him a prophet, to raise his drooping spirits, and to animate him to his appointed work. Hear the message delivered to him—

[“ Be strong, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.” Think nothing too arduous to be attempted, provided the Lord call you to it^c — — — And never doubt of success in any thing that you undertake for Him — — —]

Mark, too, the effect produced upon his mind—

[“ He took courage.” And how did he evince the power of that grace which had been bestowed upon him? He put down idolatry throughout his dominions^d — — — He summoned all his people to enter into a solemn “covenant with God, to serve Him with all their heart^e” — — — and “he deposed his mother from her throne, because she had made an idol; which he cut down, and stamped, and burned at the brook Kidron^f” — — —]

In this noble conduct he has left to us,

II. An encouraging example—

We also have difficulties, every one of us, to encounter—

[Great are the corruptions by which we are assailed — — — And fierce will be the opposition which will be

^a 2 Chron. xiv. 2.

^b ver. 17.

^c Josh. i. 6, 7, 9. 1 Chron. xxviii. 20.

^d ver. 8.

^e ver. 12.

^f ver. 16.

made to us, if we exert ourselves for the reformation of others — — —]

But to us, no less than to Asa, are the prophet's words addressed^g—

[We should “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might^h,” and if we “hold fast our confidence in him, we shall have a great recompence of rewardⁱ.” We are assured that “our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord^k.”]

In us, also, should they produce a similar effect—

[They should encourage us to serve the Lord alone — — — to serve him with our whole hearts — — — to serve him “*without partiality*, and without hypocrisy^l.” The nearest friends must be withstood, and the most endeared lust be mortified. Not a right hand, or right eye, must be retained: every thing that is offensive to God must be sacrificed without reserve.]

APPLICATION—

[If Asa acted thus on one single word of encouragement, what may be expected of you, who have had all the promises of God set before you from Sabbath to Sabbath, through many successive years? If He, under that dark dispensation, acted so noble and consistent a part, what may be expected of you, who live under the full light of the Gospel, and are instructed in all the wonders of redeeming love? — — —]

^g See Isai. xxxv. 3, 4.

^h Eph. vi. 10.

ⁱ Heb. x. 35.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^l Jam. iii. 17. 1 Tim. v. 21.

CCCCVI.

ASA'S COVENANT WITH GOD.

2 Chron. xv. 12—15. *And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; that whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman. And they sware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the Lord gave them rest round about.*

FEW persons have any just idea of the use and efficacy of ministerial exertions, when accompanied

with power from on high. In the context, we see one man, a prophet of the Lord, standing up in Jehovah's name, and by one single address turning a whole nation to the Lord their God. Doubtless the prophet Oded^a had a peculiar commission, and was honoured with a far greater measure of success than any minister in this day is authorized to expect: nevertheless every servant of the Lord, to whomsoever he may be sent, whether to kings or subjects, should deliver his message with fidelity; and in so doing, may expect that God will render his word effectual for great and extensive good. In the hope that our message shall not be altogether in vain, we come to you now in Jehovah's name, and call upon you to covenant with him as Asa and his subjects did: and, that we may prevail with you to comply with our injunctions, we will distinctly consider,

I. What covenant they made—

Here we shall separately notice,

1. The covenant itself—

[This related to nothing which they were not previously bound to fulfil. To "seek the Lord God of their fathers" was their duty: the law of Moses, yea, the law of nature, bound them to it: and reason, no less than revelation, told them, not only that they should seek after God, but that they should seek him with their whole hearts.]

2. The manner in which they made it—

[Their zeal was very remarkable; yet it was precisely what the occasion called for. That they should all solemnly *swear* to this covenant, and devote to death every soul that should refuse to concur in it, seems an instance of unparalleled harshness and intolerance; yet were both the oath which they took^b, and the proscription which they agreed to^c, expressly required in the law of Moses: if a husband or a wife were to propose a departure from God, it was the duty of the party who was so tempted to give information to the magistrate, and, on convic-

^a In ver. 1. he is called "Azariah the son of Oded:" and we apprehend that when, in ver. 8, he is called "Oded," the son of Oded is meant; this being a common abbreviation in the Scriptures. But in a popular discourse it is not necessary to notice this.

^b Deut. xxix. 10—15.

^c Deut. xvii. 2—5.

tion of the offender, to take the lead in executing the sentence of death upon him.]

But it will be asked, Would you propose this as a pattern for *us*? We answer, Yes: we would propose it as a pattern, both in the *matter* and the *manner* of it:—

1. In the matter of it—

[Let us covenant “to seek the Lord God of our fathers with our whole heart, and with our whole soul.” To seek him thus is our duty, independently of any covenant: it is due to God as our Creator; it is due to him also as our Redeemer. Did our God come down from heaven to seek *us*; and shall not we seek *him*? Did he give up himself to the accursed death of the cross for us; and shall we content ourselves with offering him a divided heart? What is the thing that deserves to be put in competition with him? What has done so much for us, or what can? Have the vanities of this world, “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,” any pretension to be his rivals? O let a sense of his unbounded love and mercy lead us to consecrate ourselves altogether to his service! If the Jews, on account of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage by the exertions of Omnipotence, were bound to seek and serve God with their whole hearts, much more are we, who have been redeemed from sin and Satan, death and hell, by the blood of God’s co-equal, co-eternal Son.]

2. In the manner of it—

[If it be thought that we are not called to *swear*, we answer, that we all have sworn already in our baptism; and have renewed our oath when we were confirmed: and, as often as we have attended at the table of the Lord, we have again repeated our oath to renounce the devil and all his works, and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ as our only Lord^d.

With respect to the *proscription*, we acknowledge that we are not at this time to enforce Christianity by an appeal to the civil power: and that to inflict the penalty of death on any persons on account of their neglect of Christ, would be to oppose the plainest dictates of his religion: but yet we may, and *must*, declare, that the judgments of God shall overtake all who either reject him altogether, or seek him with a divided heart: yea, the sentence of eternal misery denounced against

^d The term *Sacramentum* was used to signify the *oath* by which the Roman soldiers engaged never to desert the General under whom they fought.

them in the Scriptures must receive our most unqualified approbation: we must say with St. Paul, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maran-atha*;" that is, let him be accursed; and God will surely come ere long to inflict that curse upon him. Thus, notwithstanding the abrogation of penalties to be inflicted by the civil arm, under the Christian dispensation, we do in fact proceed even further than the Jews did in the covenant before us: for the judgments denounced by them related to *overt acts* only, whereas ours relate to *the heart*: and the penalties inflicted by them extended only to *the body*, whereas ours relate to *the soul*; and that too of every creature to whom the Gospel is sent, "whether small or great, whether man or woman."

If it be thought that such covenants are needless, we reply, that they are of the greatest possible utility, if solemnly entered into in our secret chamber before God: for, they contain a solemn recognition of our duty, and a deliberate vindication of God's justice in punishing all who will not seek him in his appointed way: they moreover tend exceedingly to impress our own minds with a sense of the heinousness of departing from God, and to fortify us against all the temptations to which at any time we may be exposed: and it is owing to the low state of religious attainments amongst us, that such covenants are so rarely made.

As to the idea of legality, it is no better than an excuse for our own sloth and lukewarmness. For, nothing can be more suited to the spirit of the Gospel than such covenant-transactions are; they are a strict compliance with the Apostle's exhortation "to yield our bodies unto God a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God, as our reasonable service†."

That we may be stirred up to enter into this covenant, let us contemplate,

II. The benefits resulting from it—

For the discovery of these, we need go no further than the passage before us.

In the very act,

[They were filled with great and exalted joy; "they sware, with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets; yea, all Israel rejoiced at the oath." This mode of testifying their joy was suited to the dispensation under which they lived. The joy which Christianity inspires is of a more refined nature; it is less tumultuous, but more spiritual, and more abiding: and we will venture to appeal to all who have ever solemnly devoted themselves to God in their

* 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

† Rom. xii. 1.

secret chamber, embracing the Lord Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Saviour, and surrendering up themselves to him as his redeemed people, whether they did not find in that transaction a peace and a joy which nothing else in the whole universe could impart? Do they not at this moment look back to such seasons as the happiest periods of their lives? — — — We have no fear of contradiction upon this point: we are well assured, that “all who sow in tears do reap in joy^g,” and, for the most part, “the reaper treads upon the very heels of the sower^h,” so speedily do they enjoy the reward of their labours.]

After the act was performed,

[God gave them undoubted testimonies of his acceptance. *How* he manifested it to them on this occasion, we know not: there were a great variety of ways in which he was wont to give his people an evidence of his approbation: at one time, by a lamp passing between the divided pieces of the sacrificeⁱ; at another, by a special messenger from heaven^k; at another, by a voice from heaven^l; and frequently by sending fire from heaven to consume their sacrifice^m. But whatever means he used, we are well assured, that he left them no room to doubt of his approbation of the act they had performed; for we are told, “He was found of them.” And will he not be found of us also? and has he not still many ways of manifesting himself to us? Yes; by the secret operation of his Spirit he will reveal himself to our souls, and shed abroad his love in our hearts, and “say unto our souls, I am thy salvation.”]

For a long period afterwards,

[There was peace to the land; for “God gave them rest round about.” By comparing different dates in this chapter, we find that the land had rest twenty yearsⁿ. It is true, in another part of the inspired volume, we are told, that “there was war between Asa and Baasha all their days^o,” but this, for the space mentioned in our text, was only in small contentions or skirmishes on the borders: there was no serious assault upon him from any quarter. This exhibits in a most striking point of view the *rest* which God will give to his believing and obedient people. Our spiritual enemies will not be so put down as to leave us no occasion for vigilance: their enmity will remain the same as ever; and there will still be occasional skirmishes on the borders^p: but they shall

^g Compare Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6. with Jer. xxix. 12, 13.

^h Amos ix. 13. ⁱ Gen. xv. 10, 17. ^k Dan. ix. 21.

^l John xii. 28, 29. ^m Lev. ix. 24. ⁿ ver. 10. with ver. 19.

^o 1 Kings xv. 16. ^p Gal. v. 17.

not so come against us as to overwhelm us, or even to destroy our happiness: we shall “know in whom we have believed;” and feel safety in his protection. “Weapons may be formed against us; but they shall not prosper:” and “men may fight against us; but they shall not prevail against us.” It is surprising to what an extent some are delivered from painful conflicts for a considerable time after they have devoted themselves in a solemn covenant to the Lord: their very lusts which once led them captive seem almost to be slain, and “Satan himself to be bruised under their feet.” True it is, that this will not always continue; but the more frequently and cordially we devote ourselves to God, the more abundantly will he fill us with grace and peace, and give us a foretaste of that rest which remaineth for us in a better world.]

We shall conclude with two PROPOSALS, in reference to the covenant we have been considering; and we shall make them to two distinct classes:

1. To those who think such an entire devotion of themselves to God unnecessary—

[If God do not require this service at our hands, we need not render it to him: and, if we need not render it to him, we may resolve, and even covenant to withhold it from him. We propose then to those who think there is no necessity to seek after God with their whole hearts, *Let us make a covenant together, that we never will seek him thus: let us confirm it with an oath; and let us swear aloud that heaven and earth may hear. Let us go further still, and covenant to prevent every one to the utmost of our power from seeking him in this way: let us hate, and revile, and persecute them, and, by every means that the law of the land will admit of, let us deter them from such unnecessary, fanatical, and injurious proceedings. The law will not suffer us to put them to death; but let us at least shew, that we would do it if we dared; and by the whole of our conduct towards them let us say, “Away with such fellows from the earth, for it is not fit that they should live!” Or, if any of you think that we ought to leave others at liberty, then we will wave this part of our proposal, and only covenant that we will never seek after God ourselves. Now then let us begin: let us address ourselves to the sacred Majesty of heaven: let us tell him that he has no such claim upon us as he pretends to in his word, and that we are determined never to render him the service he requires. — — — What! Do you hold back? Do you shudder at the proposal? Do you tremble at the thought of entering into such a covenant? Yes; methinks, there is not one person present that is bold enough to give it his sanction: yet there are many who act agreeably to the tenour of that*

covenant; many who seek God in a mere formal way, or at best with a divided heart. Know then, all ye who violate your duties to your God, that you stand condemned in your own consciences; and, "if your own hearts condemn you, God is greater than your hearts," and will condemn you also. Attend then with becoming reverence to the proposal which we next make,]

2. To those who desire to approve themselves to God in the way that he requires—

[The making of covenants in our own strength is in no respect advisable: but in humble dependence on the grace of Christ we *may* make them, and *ought* to make them. We read of the Christians in Macedonia, that, previous to serving God with their *property*, "they gave *their* *own*selves to the Lord^a." And this is what the Prophet Jeremiah foretells as characterizing the godly under the Christian dispensation; "Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten^r." Now then let us do it: let us all be of one heart and one mind in this particular: let us look up to God for his grace, that we may be enabled to keep the vow which we are about to make: and may "God be found of us," whilst we are thus seeking him; and "give us rest" in our souls, even that rest which our blessed Lord has promised unto all that come to him in truth^t!

O thou gracious and ever-blessed God, "who hast formed us for thyself," and hast moreover redeemed us by the blood of thine only dear Son, thine we are by every tie. We are conscious that "we are not our own; and that, having been bought with a price, we are bound to glorify thee with our bodies and our spirits, which are thine." We desire then now to consecrate ourselves to thee; and engage, as in thine immediate presence, "no longer to live unto ourselves, but unto Him that died for us and rose again." May we never forget this vow, or act for a moment inconsistent with it! We avouch thee this day to be our God; and we give up ourselves to thee as thy people: and we desire, that "thou wouldest sanctify us wholly; and that our whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ^u."]

^a 2 Cor. viii. 5.

^r Jer. l. 4, 5.

^s Here the persons *confirmed* might be particularly addressed.

^t Matt. xi. 28, 29.

^u 1 Thess. v. 23.

CCCCVII.

. GOD'S REGARD FOR HIS PEOPLE.

2 Chron. xvi. 9. *The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.*

IN estimating the characters of men, God looks not so much at their actions as at their motives and principles. It is by them that the *quality* of our actions must be determined : for though no motives, however good, can sanctify a bad action, no action however good can be acceptable to God, if its motive and principle be not pure. There were, it is true, several things which were blameworthy in the conduct of Asa, which was here reprov'd. He ought not to have made a league at all, we apprehend, with a heathen prince ; but certainly not to have induced him to violate the league which he had already made with Israel. But that which rendered his conduct so displeasing to God, was, the distrust from which it sprang. He had not long before been delivered by God from far greater danger ; and yet now, instead of applying to God for help again, he placed his dependence on an arm of flesh. In the reproof administered to him on this occasion, the general providence of God, and his tender care of all who trust in him, is strongly asserted : and it is a subject well worthy of the most attentive consideration.

Let us consider,

I. When the heart may be said to be "perfect towards God"—

As for *absolute* perfection in this world, it exists only in the deluded imaginations of some visionary enthusiasts. Nevertheless there is a perfection to which we should aspire, and which we may all attain, which consists in integrity, where "the heart is right with God." This may be said to be the case,

1. When our trust in God is entire—

[The heart of an unconverted man has no disposition to trust in God; nor indeed has he any just ground for trust in him, since God is his enemy. But after a man has been awakened to a sense of his sins, and has sought for mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ, and has even some comfortable evidence that he has obtained mercy, yet he finds it exceeding difficult to repose his confidence in God, to the extent that the Scripture warrants him to do so. He cannot believe that God is so attentive to his concerns, so ready to administer to his wants, and so all-sufficient for his necessities, as he is represented to be in the Holy Scriptures. In proportion as he grows in the knowledge of God, his trust in God is enlarged: and when he comes to realize the idea, that there is nothing, whether great or small, that is not ordered by God, nor any situation which he cannot, or will not, overrule for our good, if only we put our trust in him; and when, in consequence of this conviction, his whole care for body and for soul, for time and for eternity, is cast on God, and he rests on God's promises "without staggering at any of them through unbelief;" then he honours God as he ought, and his heart may be said to be perfect towards God. The difference between a person who has not attained this perfection, and one who has, may be seen in Elisha and his servant: the one, though well instructed, and habituated to serve God, is troubled when he comes into circumstances of great and unexpected trial; whilst the other is composed, seeing the horses of fire and the chariots of fire forming an impregnable bulwark all around him, and God himself engaged for his support^a — — —]

2. When our desire to serve him is supreme—

[Many are the considerations which arise in the mind to influence us in the discharge of our duty. Inclination, interest, passion, the fear of man, the hope of applause, will often bias our judgment, and lead us astray. The truth is, that in all wrong conduct the heart is more to blame than we are ready to imagine: it is the film in the eye that disguises and distorts the objects: "if the eye were single, the whole body would be full of light." And here again the difference between Christians of different stature is very apparent: those of lower attainments being open to impression from a vast diversity of objects, whilst those of higher attainments keep their eyes steadily fixed on one object. It is surprising how clear the path of duty becomes, when a man discards every question but this, "What will most please my God?" But this question must be asked, not only in reference to things positively good and evil, but in reference to things in which we seem at liberty

^a 2 Kings vi. 15—17.

to adopt either alternative. Where this principle fully occupies the mind, and operates with promptness and decision, swallowing up every inferior consideration^b, there the heart is perfect towards God, and the man “stands perfect and complete in all the will of God.”]

Let us mark,

II. What tender regard God shews for persons of that character—

“He despises not the day of small things;” but those who thus honour him, shall be most abundantly honoured by him :

1. He will shew himself strong in their behalf—

[There is nothing that he will not do for them, either in a way of *providence*, or of *grace*. Are they in difficulties or trials of any kind? We say not, that he will work miracles for them as for Israel in the wilderness, or for his servants the prophets; but we do say, that what he did visibly for them, he will do invisibly for all who trust in him: and we conceive it of great importance to observe, that the miracles of former ages were not intended *only* for the comfort of those in whose behalf they were wrought, or for the confirming of the messages delivered by them, but *also* for *demonstrating to the very senses of men what a minute attention he would pay to the concerns of all his people, and what effectual succour he would impart unto them in every time of need*. As the imputation of righteousness to Abraham by faith was not recorded for his sake alone, but for that of believers in all ages^c, so the miracles wrought, whether for him or others, were not wrought for their sakes alone, but for ours also, who shall experience similar interpositions, only in a less visible way: for them he accomplished ends *without* means; for us he will accomplish them *by* means: nor have we any more reason to be anxious about events than the most favoured of his servants had in the days of old^d.

Assuredly too will he afford us under spiritual trials the assistance of his grace. The promises, “My grace is sufficient for thee;” and, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;” are as valid at this day as they were in the days of Paul and Joshua: nor can there be any temptation whatever which we shall not be enabled to surmount, if only we trust in him^e.]

2. He will search out all occasions for such displays of his power—

^b Acts iv. 19, 20. and xxi. 13.

^c Rom. iv. 22—24.

^d Phil. iv. 6.

^e 1 Cor. x. 13.

[We have not to awaken him by our cries, or to prevail upon him by our pleadings, as though he were of himself either inattentive to us, or adverse to undertake our cause. It is not for *this* end that our prayers and tears are required; but for the impressing of our own minds, that all our help must come from him. His eye is upon us from the first moment that we begin to think of him; yea, his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to find out the objects, as it were, who feel their need of him. Whether they be in a cottage or a dungeon, he will fly to their aid, and delight to make known towards them "the exceeding greatness of his power^f," and "the exceeding riches of his grace^g." Whilst Satan, their great adversary, "goes to and fro through the earth" "seeking whom he may devour," our God will surely not be less vigilant in our defence. His whole heart and his whole soul are engaged for us^h, nor will he lose one whom he has given to his beloved Sonⁱ.]

As an IMPROVEMENT of this subject, we will suggest a few words,

1. Of warning—

[Let *those who neglect God* consider that his eyes are over them no less than over the righteous; but it is in order to bring upon them all the evil that he has denounced against them^k — — — And let *those who profess to know him, but in works deny him*, remember, that it will be of little profit to "have a name to live, if they are either dead, or dying" in his sight^l — — — Above all, let *those who, like Asa, are in the main "perfect before God,"* beware how they resent the reproofs that may be given them for any failures in their duty^m: for, though they should be saved at last, they little know what *dereliction* or *punishment*ⁿ they may suffer for their fault before they die — — —]

2. Of encouragement—

[Let not any say, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me." "Can a woman forget her sucking child? *She* may; but *God* never will" forsake the meanest of his people^o. Think not of the greatness of your difficulties, but of the love, and power, and faithfulness of your God — — — Then in the midst of your warfare, you may already begin the shouts of victory^p — — — Only believe, and you shall assuredly "see the glory of God^q."]]

^f Eph. i. 18, 19.

^g Jer. xxxii. 40, 41.

^k Amos ix. 4. Prov. v. 21.

^m ver. 10.

^o Isai. xlix. 14, 15.

^q John xi. 40.

^h Eph. ii. 7.

ⁱ John x. 27—29. Luke xii. 32.

^l Rev. iii. 2.

ⁿ Both of these are seen in ver. 12.

^p Rom. viii. 33—39.

CCCCVIII.

THE ROYAL EDICT.

ADVERTISEMENT.—The author feels it necessary to prefix to this Sermon some short account of the occasion on which it was delivered.

The author was at Amsterdam, (in June 1818,) partly with a view of re-establishing there an Episcopal Chapel, in which there had been no service for seven years, but principally with a view of seeking the welfare of the Children of Israel. He went thither rather to explore than to act. (See Neh. ii. 12—16.) But just previous to the 18th of June, he understood that the Third Anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo was to be kept throughout the Netherlands, as a day of thanksgiving: and just at that time also he quite accidentally heard, that the King of the Netherlands had *a year before* issued an Edict, requiring all the Jews to educate their children in the knowledge of their own Scriptures, and calling upon all his Christian Subjects to aid in this good work. Despondency, not unlike to that which paralyzed all exertion at Jerusalem, in Nehemiah's days, so universally prevailed, that no one had risen to the occasion; the very Commissioners, who had been appointed to carry the Edict into effect, had published a Report, in which they gave it as their opinion, "that the Lord's time was not come;" and there was great danger that the gracious designs of the Monarch would be altogether frustrated. The author therefore judged this a fit occasion for calling the attention of the Public to the Edict; and accordingly, after devoting the Morning Service to the more appropriate subject of the day, he employed the Evening Service in an endeavour to forward this good work. Considerable attention was excited to the subject by means of the Sermon; which was therefore instantly printed in Dutch, French, and English, for the purpose of its being circulated throughout the Netherlands: and he has reason to hope, that active exertions were afterwards made in many places, to promote, what every benevolent mind must ardently desire, the edification and welfare of the Jewish People.

So good an example having been set by the Emperor of Russia and the King of the Netherlands, the author hopes that the attention of our own Governors also, both in Church and State, may be called to this long-neglected People; and that, now the British Public has been invited by authority (the King's Letter) to aid in

supporting Missions to the *Heathen World*, the claims of the *Jewish Nation*, to whom under God we owe all the light that we ourselves enjoy, will not be overlooked. It is with a view to this great object, that the author sends forth the Sermon in this country ; where, if the foregoing explanation had not been given, its relevancy and use might have been justly called in question.

2 Chron. xvii. 9. *And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.*

ON a day set apart for thanksgiving to God for mercies received, it is peculiarly proper to consider what we may render unto the Lord for all his benefits. Certainly, if any event ever deserved repeated annual commemoration, it is that which has freed the world from the most grievous tyranny that ever it endured. Of the bitter cup which was put into the hands of every nation in Europe, this nation^a drank very deeply : and the change which it has experienced, in the restoration of their rightful Monarch, and in the establishment of a free Constitution, calls for their devoutest acknowledgments to Almighty God. Doubtless we may with justice pay some tribute of honour to those who by their counsels and their arms effected the overthrow of the Usurper : but it is God alone who giveth victory to kings, and to whom the glory of this great victory must be primarily ascribed : and he who accounts a day consecrated to this service superfluous, shews, that he is far from justly appreciating the blessings that have been conferred upon him. The monarch himself has given to his people a very decided evidence, that *he* feels the depth of his obligations to the God of his salvation : and it will be your own loss if you do not cultivate a similar spirit, and improve the occasion to the honour of your God.

But it is not to thanksgiving only that your Monarch invites you : he calls you, by a special Edict, to unite with him in seeking the welfare of your Jewish

^a The Netherlands.

Brethren, who, in their struggle with the enemy, signally approved their fidelity to their legitimate Sovereign. Their welfare he in his turn studies to promote; and he desires to combine the energies of all his subjects in efforts for their good. Methinks he is like Jehoshaphat of old, who, well knowing that piety must be founded in knowledge, and happiness in piety, sent forth the Princes of his empire, with a select number of Priests and Levites, to instruct his people in the knowledge of God's blessed word.

His edict on this occasion, and the manner in which it was carried into effect, will form the subject of my present discourse.

I. Then, we notice the edict of King Jehoshaphat—

This was such as became a great and pious monarch: and we shall find it not unprofitable or unsuitable to the present occasion, to enter into a distinct consideration of it. We observe then, that it was a *kind and benevolent* edict; a *wise and politic* edict; a *good and beneficial* edict.

Mark *the benevolence* displayed in it. He sought the present and eternal welfare of his subjects. He knew, that as men are raised above the beasts by the exercise of reason, so are they elevated in the scale of rational beings, in proportion as their intellectual powers are cultivated and enlarged. Man destitute of knowledge, is a mere savage; but when instructed in the various branches of science, he becomes refined, and civilized, and capable of contributing to the general good. In the very cultivation of knowledge there is much pleasure arising to the mind; and in the application of that knowledge to useful purposes there is an exquisite delight. We need only observe persons when employed in their several vocations, how happy they are, how contented, how cheerful, oftentimes unconsciously proclaiming their happiness, like the birds of the air, in festal songs, or consciously, and with devotion, in songs of praise.

But it was not mere intellectual improvement which Jehoshaphat sought to convey; he wished his

people to be instructed in the knowledge of that God whom they professed to fear and worship. This alone could make them truly happy: this alone could impart to them sound wisdom or solid consolation. He therefore gave particular directions that they should be taught "in the Book of the Law of the Lord," and *this* throughout the whole land. O happy people, whose governor so employed the authority with which he was invested! And happy that monarch, who so improved his influence, not for his own personal aggrandizement, but for the best interests of the people committed to his charge! In so doing, he approved himself to be indeed what every governor should be, the friend and father of his people.

Nor was *the policy* of this measure at all inferior to its benevolence. A people well instructed in moral and religious knowledge will view government as an ordinance of God, and will learn to obey the constituted authorities, not so much from fear of their wrath, as for conscience sake towards God. They will view their governors as God's vicegerents upon earth; and will consider allegiance to *them* as an essential part of their duty to *him*. Hence will spring up love in their hearts, and a real delight in manifesting, on all proper occasions, their loyalty to their king: they will form a bulwark around his person in case of necessity, and even glory in laying down their lives for him as their greatest benefactor.

The *benefits* arising from this edict were incalculable. Such was the effect of it, that the fear of Jehoshaphat, and of Jehovah as his protector, fell on all the nations that were round about him; so that none, however hostile in their hearts, dared to make war against him^b. Doubtless this resulted chiefly from an impression made upon their minds by God himself: yet it was also produced by a dread of that energy which an united people were ready to put forth at any instant, at the call of their beloved monarch. At the same time that peace was thus secured, prosperity reigned in every part of the

^b ver. 10.

empire; and, as the immediate fruit of it, Jehoshaphat, as well as the people, "had riches and honour in abundance^c." In his own mind too he reaped the fruits of his own benevolence. God smiled upon him, and manifested himself to him, and enabled him to walk with "his heart lifted up in the ways of the Lord^d."

Such was the edict of the pious Jehoshaphat,—benevolent, politic, beneficial. And what, I would ask, is the Edict which has been issued by the highest authority in this kingdom? Do we not see in it the same blessed characters as in that which we have been considering? It was "in the third year of his reign^e" that Jehoshaphat sent forth teachers to enlighten and instruct his subjects. The very instant he felt himself at liberty from the more urgent and pressing calls of duty, (such as the fortifying of his land against foreign enemies, and the correcting of some great internal abuses,) he engaged in this good work of diffusing light and knowledge through all classes of the community. In like manner the sovereign of this kingdom has scarcely had time to repair the ravages of war, and to establish his empire, too long weakened and impoverished by a cruel usurpation, before he stands forth as the friend and father of his people, and more especially of that portion of them who have in every age and place been most treated with neglect and disdain, to have them educated in scriptural knowledge and in the fear of God. It is much to be lamented, that the Jewish people have not in general been so attentive either to the learning or morals of their children as might be wished: and hence arose a necessity for some authoritative admonition on the subject. Yet, if I may say it without offence, this neglect has not been more reprehensible in them, than has been the indifference with which the Christian world has regarded it. The monarch (may God recompense it richly into his bosom!) has risen up to remedy the supineness both of the one and the other, and to call forth the

^c ver. 5.^d ver. 6.^e ver. 7.

united energies of all to correct and terminate this evil. Yet, whilst he thus consults the best interests of his subjects, with what paternal tenderness has he guarded against wounding the feelings of any, or exciting their religious prejudices! The Scriptures of the Old Testament are alone to be used in the schools that shall be established; even those Scriptures, which Jews as well as Christians believe to have been given by inspiration of God, and to contain truth without any mixture of error. In this is marked the policy, no less than the benevolence, of the edict; for it is not by constraint, but by conciliation and kindness, that good is to be done to any, and more especially to those who have shewn themselves now, for so many centuries, proof against all the efforts of intimidation or force. In this kingdom they form no small body, and, I may add, no unimportant portion of the community. It is well known how extensive is their influence in the affairs of commerce; and how, by their activity, they contribute to enrich the state. Hence it is now generally seen and felt, that they are entitled to the same respect as any other subjects of the realm; and whilst, as in the present instance, they see how deeply their monarch feels interested in their welfare, they cannot but on *their* part be sensible of the privileges they enjoy under his paternal government, and testify their gratitude to him by every possible expression of loyalty and affection.

What the ultimate effect of these measures will be, may be conjectured from the blessed results of the edict of Jehoshaphat: all will feel themselves happy under the government of such a prince; and he, whilst he is respected abroad, and beloved at home, will have the happiness of seeing his labours crowned with prosperity throughout his dominions, and with peace in his own soul.

II. The manner in which Jehoshaphat's edict was carried into execution is now to be noticed—

The promptness with which his commands were

executed deserves the highest praise. All were ready to co-operate in this good work as soon as it was proposed. "Princes, and priests, and Levites^f," all addressed themselves to it instantly, with one heart and one soul. None accounted their dignity so high, or their functions so sacred, but they thought it an honour to be employed in such a service, and found a delight in fulfilling the wishes of their revered monarch: all entered into the work with zeal, and prosecuted it with diligence; and hence a rapid change was effected both in the temporal and spiritual condition of the whole nation. And what may not be effected in this kingdom also, if a similar zeal be exercised by "the princes and priests" (the magistrates and clergy) of the land? With them it must begin. Those who move in a lower station can effect nothing, if they be not aided and countenanced by the higher orders, whose rank in life, or sacredness of character, will give a tone to the general feeling, and combine the energies of the whole kingdom. If it be said, that those for whom the benefit is designed do not feel a desire after it, this only shews how much they need it, and how earnestly we should all embark in a cause proposed by such high authority, and recommended by the soundest dictates of wisdom and piety.

That our obligations to unite in this labour of love may the more distinctly appear, I would beg leave to suggest the following considerations.

First, *Loyalty to the king demands our concurrence with him in this good work*, and a holy emulation amongst us to carry into effect his benevolent designs. What can the greatest or best of men effect, (what could Jehoshaphat himself have done?) if there be none to act in subserviency to them, and to follow their directions? As the most potent monarch upon earth would in vain proclaim war, if there were no soldiers found to enlist under his banners and to

^f ver. 7, 8.

execute his commands, so it will be in vain that the design of benefiting the Jewish people was ever conceived in the mind of the king, or that his edict respecting them was ever issued, if his subjects do not put forth their energies in obedience to his call. In truth, a backwardness to co-operate with him in this blessed work would seem like a reflection cast upon him, as recommending a measure that was unworthy of attention. I do not mean to insinuate that such an idea really exists in the minds of any; for I am perfectly convinced it does not: but certainly in appearance it is open to this construction; and every subject of the empire is concerned to act in such a way, as to cut off all occasion for a reflection like this. I say, loyalty alone, even if we had no higher motive, should be sufficient to call forth our exertions in this cause.

But let me next observe, that *gratitude to the Jewish nation demands it at our hands*. How great, how manifold are our obligations to them! Behold Moses and the prophets, what instruction have they given us, in reference to the way of life and salvation! Without the moral law, as revealed by Moses, we should never have known to what an extent we need a Saviour; nor, if the prophecies had not so fully designated the promised Messiah, could we have ever so fully known that Jesus was the Christ. Of whom did the Lord Jesus Christ himself come as pertaining to the flesh, but from the loins of David, and of the seed of Abraham? Yet to him are we indebted for all that we either have, or hope for, in time or in eternity. And who were the Apostles, but Jews, who for our sakes went forth preaching the word, and counted not their lives dear to them, so that they might but lead us to the knowledge of Christ, and make us partakers of his salvation? From them too we have received the lively oracles, which are the one source of all spiritual knowledge, and the one foundation of all our hopes. Does all this call for no recompence at our hands? Knowing as we do the vast importance of education, should

we not endeavour to impart it to those from whose ancestors we have received such innumerable, such inestimable benefits? Yet behold, these are the people whom for many, many centuries, we have treated with more neglect and contempt than any other people upon the face of the earth: the savages of the most distant climes have received more attention from us than they. Surely it is high time that the Christian world awake to a sense of their duty, and begin to shew to the Jews somewhat of that love, which *their* forefathers exercised towards us in our Gentile state. We are debtors to them to a vast amount, and it is high time that we begin to discharge our debt. And how can we discharge it better, than by enabling them to read and understand those very oracles, which they have preserved with such fidelity, and which testify so fully of their promised Messiah?

Further: *A love to the rising generation should lead us to avail ourselves of the present opportunity to promote their welfare.*—It is truly afflictive to see how low and degraded is the state of multitudes, especially of the Jewish nation, purely through the neglect with which they are treated in their early youth: and still more grievous is it to reflect on their ignorance of those things which belong to their everlasting peace. To counteract this, we should endeavour to qualify the whole of their population for good and useful employments; and, through the medium of useful instruction, to make them holy, and to make them happy. We need never be afraid that there will not be a sufficient number of poor to fill the lower stations: do what we will, there will never be wanting persons, who, through their own fault or misfortunes, are necessitated to undertake the lowest offices of life. And, if they have been previously instructed in the Scriptures of Truth, they will have a fund of consolation ever open to them in their deepest afflictions; they will learn from the inspired volume, in whatsoever state they are, therewith to be content; and in the prospect of the eternal

world, they will find joys with which a stranger intermeddleth not, and which the world can neither give nor take away. We feel the force of these considerations in reference to the poor of our own communion: how is it that we feel it not in reference to our Jewish Brethren? This is a partiality unworthy of us; and we should rise as one man to wipe off this disgrace from our own character.

This brings me to the last consideration which I propose to mention; namely, that *a concern for the honour of our holy religion should operate to unite us all in executing the Royal Edict.*—What must a Jew think of our religion, when he sees how little it has wrought for us in the production of love? We may tell him of a Messiah, who has loved us, and laid down his life for us: but what credit will he give us for our principles, when he sees how little our practice corresponds with them! May he not well say to us, “Physician, heal thyself?” Shew by your conduct the superiority of your principles, before you call on me to embrace them. It is by love that we must win them: it is by shewing kindness to them that we must efface from their hearts those prejudices which, with too much reason, they entertain against us. We must exhibit in our own person the loveliness of Christianity, before we can bring them to investigate the grounds of our faith, or to imagine that they can improve their own condition by embracing it. May I not then call upon you as Christians to unite in the good work that is now before you, that you may thereby serve and glorify your Lord and Saviour? As Christians, you believe that there is no other way to the Father but by Christ^g; and no other name but his, whereby any human being can be saved^h. Where is your piety, where is your love to Christ, where is even common humanity, if you will not avail yourselves of the present opportunity to remove from before your Jewish Brethren the stumbling-blocks, which for so many ages have been laid in their way?

^g John xiv. 6.

^h Acts iv. 12.

Do any ask, What shall we do? I answer, search out amongst the Jews some persons of probity and talent to commence schools among them; and do you yourselves aid to the utmost of your power in the support of them; provide them with all necessary books for instructing children in the first rudiments of knowledge; provide them with Bibles also, both in the Dutch and Hebrew languages, that they may be thoroughly instructed in the knowledge of their own religion, and learn to walk in the steps of their father Abraham, and of all the holy prophets.

Begin too, without loss of time, *Adult Schools*. You will find many among the house of Israel who will be glad to avail themselves of your instructions. Let those who are benevolent amongst you dedicate an hour in a day to the instructing of a few who may be desirous to learn; and carefully avoid every thing which may give unnecessary offence. Confine yourselves to the Old Testament, which they venerate, as well as you. Let those who can teach only in the Dutch language give instruction in that: and let those who either understand, or have leisure to attain, the Hebrew tongue, draw their attention to that. In particular, let it be the united endeavour of all to qualify masters for this good work.

And let it not be thought, that this is the duty of men only. The Royal Edict has particularly, and with great wisdom, recommended it to females, who may be of infinite service in conveying instruction to their own sex. This age is distinguished above all others for the activity of females in the service of God, and in the performance of every good work. Were I able to declare the proportion of good that is done in Britain by the female sex, it would appear incredible: I believe from my soul that it far exceeds one half in all the societies raised since the commencement of the present century, in the Bible Society, the Missionary Societies, and the Society for Promoting the Knowledge of Christianity amongst the Jews: yes, let the ladies of this country exert themselves, in a prudent, modest and discreet way,

and the effects will soon appear; the Royal Edict will not be a dead letter, but will produce incalculable good to the whole nation;—and the agents in this benevolent work will themselves receive quite as much benefit as they impart, their benevolence being, in proportion as it is exercised, its own reward.

CCCCIX.

JEHOSHAPHAT'S CONNEXION WITH AHAB REPROVED.

2 Chron. xix. 2. *And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord.*

IT is happy when pious children rise up in the places of their parents, and, unmoved by the sufferings which their fathers have experienced, dare to tread in their steps with fidelity and zeal. Hanani, the father of Jehu, had been cast into prison for the faithful reproof which he administered to King Asa^a: yet does Jehu give a similar reproof to Asa's son and successor, Jehoshaphat: and, as he was enabled to temper his reproof with seasonable commendation, he succeeded in convincing the monarch of his fault, and in stirring him up to a more becoming conduct.

The conduct here blamed, was, Jehoshaphat's uniting himself with Ahab against the king of Syria: but the terms in which the censure was conveyed, are of more general import, and may be applied to all alliances with the ungodly. We will endeavour therefore to improve them, by shewing,

I. What is that intimacy with the ungodly which God forbids—

We are not to suppose that *all* connexion with them is forbidden; for then, as the Apostle says, “We must needs go out of the world,” since the necessities of our nature constrain us to keep up

^a 2 Chron. xvi. 7—10.

some sort of intercourse with them. Moreover, there is an attention to them which *compassion* itself demands, and which our blessed Saviour himself manifested to such a degree, as to incur the reproach of being “a friend of publicans and sinners.” Nor are we to forget, that *courtesy* is one of the most amiable and important of Christian graces. “Be pitiful, be courteous,” is the command of God himself: and they who are grossly deficient in relation to this duty, as too many professors of religion are, have greatly mistaken the true genius of Christianity, which is, in every possible modification of it, a religion of love.

Yet is there a very broad line of distinction to be drawn between the extremes of unmeasured union with the world, and a contemptuous abstraction from it. Though the righteous are not to despise the ungodly, they are carefully to avoid,

1. An alliance with them—

[Under the law, all intermarriages with the heathen were strictly forbidden: and under the Gospel the same law applies to the ungodly: the Apostle's direction respecting those who are seeking a matrimonial alliance, is, “Let them marry, *only in the Lord*.” In many places of Scripture are the evils arising from unequal marriages of believers with unbelievers, strongly marked^c: we must not wonder then that such contracts are expressly forbidden^d.]

2. A conformity to them—

[They who are of the world, both speak of the world, and act agreeably to its dictates: they have no higher objects in view, than “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.” But these are wholly unsuited to the Christian's state: they are in direct opposition to that holy and heavenly course which he is commanded to pursue^e: and therefore he is enjoined “on no account to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of his mind, that he may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God^f.”]

3. An unnecessary association with them—

^b 1 Cor. vii. 39.

^c Gen. vi. 2, 3. and in Jehoshaphat's own son; 2 Chron. xxi. 6.

^d 2 Cor. vi. 14—16. ^e 1 John ii. 15, 16. ^f Rom. xii. 2.

[We should not choose them as our friends and companions: for "how can two walk together, except they be agreed?" We almost of necessity imbibe the spirit of our associates; and therefore we should select for our acquaintance those who will help us forward, and not those who will retard us, in our heavenly course. We can never too attentively consider that instructive declaration of Solomon, "He that walketh with wise men, will be wise; but a companion of fools will be destroyed^s."]]

That such intimacy with the ungodly is not prohibited by God without reason, will appear, whilst we shew,

II. Why it is so displeasing to him—

God was greatly offended with Jehoshaphat, and severely punished him for his fault. It was *in consequence of his alliance with Ahab* that his eldest son Jehoram slew all his younger brethren^h, and that all his grandchildren were slain by Jehuⁱ. And in every instance, such intimacy with the ungodly is offensive to him;

1. On account of the state of mind it implies—

[It is evident that any person professing godliness, and at the same time affecting the society of the ungodly, must be in a very degenerate state. Such a state of mind indicates in a very high degree, *a want of love to God—a want of aversion to sin—a want of self-knowledge—and a want of common prudence.*

How low must be his *love to God!* Would any man who loved his parents and his family select for his intimate friend a man that was the avowed enemy of them all? Yet the character of the ungodly is, that they are "haters of God^k:" how then can any one who truly loves God, take such a person for his bosom friend, or maintain, except from necessity, any intercourse with him?

And small indeed must be his *aversion to sin*, when he can find pleasure in those who belong to "a world that lieth in wickedness," and whose whole life is a continued and voluntary course of sin.

His self-knowledge too must be at a very low ebb, if he think that he can frequent such company without having both his principles and his practice greatly vitiated.

^s Prov. xiii. 20.

^h 2 Chron. xxi. 4.

ⁱ 2 Kings x. 13, 14. and especially 2 Chron. xxii. 7, 8.

^k Rom. i. 30. and viii. 7.

Even to *common prudence* he is almost an utter stranger: for would any man on the brink of a stupendous precipice go unnecessarily to the utmost edge of it, where it was exceeding rough and slippery, rather than pursue a path which was comparatively both safe and easy? Yet this is his conduct, who chooses to mix unnecessarily with a tempting and ensnaring world: and the absurdity of it is strongly marked in the expressions of our text, where an APPEAL is made to *the common sense and reason of mankind*; "Shouldst thou love them that hate the Lord?"

2. On account of its pernicious tendency—

[We form very erroneous calculations on this subject. We are ready to think that we shall ingratiate ourselves with the world, and recommend religion to their favourable acceptance: but the very reverse is the case; we lower ourselves in their estimation, and make them think better of their own religion than they would otherwise do. They take for granted that religion sanctions all that conformity to their customs that they see in us; and consequently that they are much nearer to the standard of true religion than they really are: nor are they a whit more reconciled to those practices which they do not choose to follow, and which, in spite of all our efforts, they will account over-righteous, unnecessary, and absurd. It will be found almost invariably that little, if any, good accrues to the ungodly from such sacrifices, and that great injury is sustained by those who make them.]

In the chapter preceding our text, we may see the experiment fairly made. Jehoshaphat having joined affinity with Ahab, paid him a friendly visit, and was hospitably received by him¹. Presently Ahab proposed to him an union of their forces in an attack on the king of Syria; to which proposal Jehoshaphat, unwilling to refuse him, accedes; but, being a pious character, recommends that an inquiry should be first made of God for his direction. To this Ahab apparently agrees; but consults none except his own idolatrous prophets^m. Jehoshaphat, not quite satisfied with *their* advice, asks if there be not a prophet of Jehovah by whom their inquiry may be made? Ahab acknowledges that there is; but that he cannot endure that prophet, because he never prophesied good concerning him, but evil. This aversion Jehoshaphat tries to soften; and for a moment prevailsⁿ: but, as soon as Micaiah has delivered his message from the Lord, Ahab is filled with rage against him, and orders him to be put in prison, and to be fed with the bread and water of affliction: and Jehoshaphat, contrary to

¹ 2 Chron. xviii. 1, 2. ^m 2 Chron. xviii. 3—5.

ⁿ 2 Chron. xviii. 6—8.

God's revealed will, proceeds with Ahab to execute the plan proposed^o. Now here is an exact representation of what generally takes place in such connexions: the compliances that are required by the ungodly, are too faintly refused; whilst the barriers interposed by the godly, produce no adequate effect. The two parties may not unfitly be compared to persons pulling against each other on a steep declivity: the one who is on the more elevated site, may think he shall prevail; but a moment's experience will suffice to shew him, that his adversary draws against him with a ten-fold advantage, both as it respects the comparative force which he is able to exert, and the greater facility with which a descending motion may be produced. Thus it is between the godly and the ungodly, when too intimate a fellowship subsists between them: the conscience of the one is ensnared and violated, whilst the other retains all his principles, dispositions, and habits.]

3. On account of its opposition to his revealed will—

[Nothing can be plainer than God's declaration respecting the friendship of the world: it is actually a state of "enmity against God:" yea, the very desire to possess its friendship is constructive treason against God himself; and actually *constitutes* treason, as much as the holding of forbidden intercourse with an earthly enemy constitutes treason against the king^p. It is in vain to dispute against such a solemn declaration as this, or to think that we can ever reconcile such opposite interests as those of "God and Mammon." We must hold to the one, or to the other: and if we choose the friendship of the world, then must we expect to be dealt with as the enemies of God. If we are found associated with the goats in this world, it is in vain to hope that we shall be numbered with the sheep in the world to come^q.]

ADDRESS—

[The character of Jehoshaphat was on the whole good: "good things were found in him; and he had prepared his heart to seek God^r." Now it is to persons of this character more particularly that our subject must be addressed: for the ungodly, when mixing with the world, are in their proper element; and the established Christian feels but little temptation to go back to worldly pleasures, or to worldly society. But the temptation to young and inexperienced Christians is great. Be it remembered however by all, that the true disciples of our Lord "are not of the world, even as he was not of the world."

^o 2 Chron. xviii. 16, 17, 25—28. ^p Jam. iv. 4. See the Greek.

^q Matt. xxv. 32, 33.

^r ver. 3.

They cannot say to an ungodly man, "I am as thou art;" for they are as different from him as light from darkness. "By the cross of Christ, they are crucified unto the world, as the world also is to them^a." Let me entreat you then, Brethren, not to "be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, but to come out from among them, and be separate[†];" and endeavour to be in reality, what all the Lord's people are by profession "a city set upon a hill," and "lights shining in a dark place."]

^a Gal. vi. 14.

[†] 2 Cor. vi. 14, 17.

CCCCX.

PRAYER THE BEST MEANS OF DEFEATING INVASION ^a.

2 Chron. xx. 2—4. *Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazon-tamar, which is En-gedi. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord.*

THERE is scarcely any thing that more awfully proves men's fallen state than their readiness to devour one another. There is not a nation under heaven where the art of war is not cultivated; and he who attains the highest proficiency in that art, and is crowned with most success in destroying his fellow-creatures, is deemed the greatest benefactor to his country, and is rewarded with all the honours that can be heaped upon him. Under these circumstances it is not optional with a nation whether they will have a military force: they are compelled to maintain armies, and to preserve their lives and liberties by the same means that others use to subjugate and overwhelm them. Yet there are other means of self-defence, which, though they do not supersede the use of arms, are more effectual than numerous levies, or military skill. What these means are, the text informs us. Jehoshaphat was invaded by three confederate armies; and, though

^a *Fast-day Sermon*, Oct. 19, 1803.

taken by surprise, and consequently not having an hour to lose in mustering his forces, he devoted a day to humiliation and prayer for the divine aid. This to many would seem absurd: but to those who believe in the all-governing providence of God, it will appear the most rational and most efficacious method of defence, which it was possible for him to adopt.

In considering this account of Jehoshaphat, we shall point out,

I. His feelings on the approach of an invasion—

We have no reason to think that Jehoshaphat was defective in courage; yet he “feared.” But what was it that he dreaded? was it merely his own personal danger? No; he feared,

1. The calamities that were coming on the nation—

[Fear even of personal danger is by no means incompatible with real courage. It is an affection planted in the human breast by God himself, and is necessary to put us on our guard, and to stir us up to use the means of safety. It is then only to be deemed a weakness, when it incapacitates us for deliberate counsel, or manly exertion. But when the danger is public, and the welfare of a whole nation is at stake, then it is criminal not to fear: thoughtlessness and indifference then become most inexcusable, inasmuch as they manifest an atheistical security with respect to themselves, and an utter want of humanity towards others. Who can reflect on the miseries that an invading army may occasion, and not tremble for the land that is exposed to them? We confess, that one of the worst symptoms that appear in *our* land, at this present moment, is, the general, and almost total, want of this fear. It should seem as if we thought it out of the power of man, or even of God himself, to hurt us. We are really sleeping, while our enemies are watchful; and folding our arms in security, while the gathering storm is ready to burst upon us. Would to God that we had more fear of the approaching danger! and then we should have less cause to fear when it shall have actually arrived.]

2. The displeasure of God in them—

[This it is which makes an invading army terrible. This renders even the weakest insect, a locust, or a caterpillar, an

object of dread^b. We are assured that “men are God’s sword;” and that whatever be the motive that actuates them, it is *he* who gives them their commission, it is *he* who sends them to “avenge the quarrel of his covenant^c.” Now Jehoshaphat had particular reason to apprehend the divine displeasure, having incurred it by making an alliance with Ahab^d: and doubtless he considered the invaders as persons sent of God to inflict the punishment he deserved. And *was* not this just ground for fear?

Here again we cannot but lament that the generality amongst us leave God out of their thoughts: they declaim against the ambition of him who would reduce us, as he has done one half of Europe, to a state of vassalage; but they never associate with his plans the idea of God’s displeasure. To say that “God had stirred him up against us^e,” would be looked upon as absurd: to suggest that he was an instrument in God’s hands, lifted up to punish our sins, would be deemed a weak enthusiastic notion, a dream of a distempered imagination. But this is true, whether we will believe it or not: and it is *this*, much more than either the number of his forces, or the inveteracy of his malice, which renders him formidable. Were he far less equal to the contest than he is, our multiplied iniquities which have incensed God against us, might well make him an object of terror. And the less we fear him as the instrument of God’s wrath, the more likely we are to be given over to his power.]

Corresponding with Jehoshaphat’s feelings on account of the invasion were,

II. The means he used to defeat it—

Doubtless he did not neglect any prudent means of defence which his circumstances would admit of. But, together with these,

“He set himself to seek the Lord” by fasting and prayer—

[Jehoshaphat well knew that all things were subject to God’s control; that the events of war were in *his* hands^f; and that it was equally easy with *him* to “save by many or by few^g.” He knew that God was ever ready to forgive those who confessed and forsook their sins, and to interpose for the

^b Alluding to the plagues of Egypt.

^c Lev. xxvi. 25. 2 Kings xxiv. 2, 3. ^d 2 Chron. xix. 2.

^e 1 Sam. xxvi. 19. 1 Kings xi. 14, 23. 1 Chron. v. 26. and 2 Chron. xxi. 16.

^f ver. 6, 15.

^g 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

preservation of those who trusted in him. Under this conviction he not only fasted and prayed himself, but “proclaimed a fast,” in order that all his subjects might join in these holy exercises, and, by their united importunity, prevail on God to spare them. It might have been thought, that to consecrate a day to such a service, when there seemed not an hour to spare, was impolitic: but he was aware that the greatest preparations without God would avail nothing; and that, if *his* favour and assistance were secured, no enemies could ever prevail against him. In this holy service therefore he engaged with earnestness; and all his subjects, male and female, old and young, concurred with him^h.]

This was, in truth, the most effectual means he could employ—

[If we consider how successfully these means had been employed in former times, the wisdom of his conduct will immediately appear. God had on many occasions *given direction* to his people, where, and when, and how, to attack their enemiesⁱ. He had *strengthened* them miraculously for the combat^k; and *crowned them with success* beyond all human expectation^l. He had invariably done this in answer to their humble and earnest supplications^m: and had as constantly withheld his succours, when they refused to humble themselves before him. There was one example in particular, with which he was well acquainted, and from which he could not fail to derive encouragement; it was that of Moses when attacked by Amalek: Moses sent Joshua into the valley to fight, whilst he himself remained on the mountain to pray; and it soon appeared that the success of the engagement did not depend on the skill or valour of Joshua, but on the holding up of the hands of Moses: when they were let down through weariness, Amalek prevailed; but on their being held up till sunset, victory was decided in favour of Israelⁿ. This was sufficient to justify and encourage Jehoshaphat in the proclaiming of a fast: and the event strongly recommends to us the use of similar means in any similar emergency. God heard and answered his prayer; and did not suffer him even to risk his life in battle: he caused dissension to arise in the confederate armies, insomuch that two of those armies combined to destroy the third, and then destroyed each other, and left all their spoil for a prey to those whose country they had invaded^o.]

^h ver. 13.

ⁱ 2 Sam. v. 23—25.

^k 2 Sam. xxiii. 8—12.

^l 1 Sam. xiv. 13—16.

^m Prayer was the cause of *Othniel's* victory, Judg. iii. 9. and *Ehud's*, Judg. v. 15. and *Barak's*, Judg. iv. 3. and *Gideon's*, Judg. vi. 6. and *Jephthah's*, Judg. x. 10.

ⁿ Exod. xvii. 11—13.

^o ver. 22—25.

INFER—

1. What reason have we for thankfulness on account of the appointment of this fast!

[Many, forgetful of Jehoshaphat's example, deny the right of the civil magistrate to proclaim a fast: and multitudes who acknowledge the propriety of such an appointment, are as regardless of the duties of this day, as if it had not been consecrated to any religious service. But there are many who really improve this occasion in devout and earnest supplication to God: and we doubt not but that more will have been done this day towards the preservation of the kingdom than could have been effected in any other way.]

2. Of what signal use to a nation are the godly and praying few!

[They are often regarded as persons that trouble and endanger the state: but it has been on their account that the nation has not been long since made as Sodom and Gomorrah^p: and, if the present days of trouble be shortened, it will be for their sake^q. These are the people who alone have interest with God; and who bring down his blessing on the land. To represent the country as indebted to *them* for its safety and success, is deemed the height of arrogance and folly. But let any one inquire what saved Jerusalem from the Assyrian hosts^r, or, in the instance before us, from the confederate armies? Was it not prayer; prayer chiefly, prayer solely and exclusively? Let atheistical scoffers then deride the idea as they please; but it is a fact, an undeniable fact, that the despised few are the greatest benefactors of their country; and that our hopes in the present contest are founded more on their prayers than on all the efforts of an arm of flesh.]

3. How much may they do for their country, who are ready to think themselves incapable of rendering it any essential service!

[Females and infirm persons may suppose themselves of no use in the present contest. But will not *their* petitions come up with acceptance before God? Shall not the prayer of faith, by whomsoever offered, prevail? Let none then imagine that they cannot benefit their country; but let all unite in weeping and supplication, and “give no rest unto our God, until he arise for our help, and make our Jerusalem a praise in the earth^s.”]

^p Isai. i. 9.

^r Isai. xxxvii. 21, 22.

^q Matt. xxiv. 22.

^s Isai. lxii. 6, 7.

CCCCXI.

FAITH THE MEANS OF NATIONAL AND PERSONAL PROSPERITY.

2 Chron. xx. 20. *Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem: Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.*

A BELIEF in the providence of God is able to compose the mind under the greatest difficulties. The Scriptures abound with displays of the efficacy of this principle. In this passage before us we are told, that three confederate armies came up against Jehoshaphat: yet, while he acknowledged that "he had no might against them," he was enabled by faith to commit his cause to God, and to go forth in triumph, as much as if he had already gained the completest victory. The words of our text are his address to his army when leading them forth to meet the enemy. One would have expected that he would rather have exhorted them to be strong and courageous: but, feeling in himself the blessed influence of faith, he rather exhorted them to the exercise of that divine principle, and assured them that by means of it they should attain success.

It is our intention to shew,

I. What is implied in the faith here recommended—

Doubtless there are many particulars which might be enumerated if it were expedient to enter fully into the nature of faith. But, if we consider to whom, and on what occasion, the address was made, we shall see at once that there were two prominent ideas contained in it; namely,

1. A renunciation of all false confidences—

[This is indispensably necessary to the exercise of faith. God is a jealous God, and "will not give his glory to another." He is rather concerned to defeat, than to prosper, the exertions of those who lean to their own understanding, or trust in an arm of flesh; because they practically deny his agency, and would be encouraged by success to harden themselves in their infidelity^a.

^a See Isai. xxx. 1—3. and xxxi. 1—3.

This self-renunciation is, if possible, still more necessary in relation to the concerns of the soul. If we trust at all in our own wisdom, goodness, or strength, God will consider us as abandoning all hope in him. However good the thing may be which we make even a joint ground of confidence before him, instead of contributing to our welfare, it will make the Gospel of no effect to us, and Christ will profit us nothing^b.]

2. A simple affiance in God—

[In the instance before us, the people were not to fight, but to stand still and see the interposition of God for them. But *we* are not therefore to neglect the proper means of self-preservation: we must use the means, but not trust in them: God alone must be our trust and our confidence: and we should commit ourselves to him, without doubting either his ability or willingness to help us.

Thus in reference also to our spiritual interests, we should never limit his mercy or his power. His promises should be the ground of our hopes, and the measure of our expectations — — —]

Having endeavoured to ascertain the true nature of faith, let us consider,

II. Its influence on our welfare—

It has a favourable aspect upon,

1. Our national prosperity—

[When a nation is enabled to exercise faith in God, there is good hope that its deliverance is nigh at hand. For faith *conciliates his favour*: he is honoured by it; and he will surely put honour upon it. Faith *engages his protection*. He has promised to be a wall of fire round his people, and as a munition of rocks: and, when they plead his promises, he will not fail in the execution of them. Faith also *calls forth his aid*. He has told us that his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth to shew himself strong in the behalf of his people; and he has proved in ten thousand instances how ready and effectual is the succour which he will afford to those who call upon him.]

2. Our personal welfare—

[In allusion to the circumstances of the history before us we may observe, that faith *will secure us victory over all our enemies*. Sin, Satan, death and hell shall all be overcome, if only we believe in Christ: yea, we shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us. Faith also will *enrich us with the most abundant spoils*. Jehoshaphat and his army were three

^b Gal. v. 2, 4.

days occupied in gathering the spoils, so wonderfully were they enriched by the very people who had sought only their destruction. And shall not we find ourselves benefited even by the assaults of our enemies? Yes, we shall have deeper discoveries of the love, the power, the faithfulness of our God, and be more amply furnished for our future conflicts. Faith moreover will *bring us to a quiet possession of our inheritance*. Jehoshaphat had rest and quiet throughout his realm by means of that exercise of faith. But we shall obtain the undisturbed enjoyment of heaven itself. As soon as faith and patience have had their perfect work, we shall be freed from enemies, and "not a dog shall wag his tongue against us" any more for ever.

Thus prosperous, thus established, shall the weakest be, provided they believe in God, and give implicit credit to his word.]

We would further ADDRESS you on this subject,

1. As members of the community—

[The state has a right to expect of you all the aid which you can afford her under the pressure of her present troubles. Will any of you say, 'I am unable to render any effectual assistance?' Pause before thou repliest in such a way. Can you exercise faith in God? Can you commit her affairs to him? Say not then, 'I can do no good:' for whether thou be old or young, male or female, healthful or infirm, thou canst render the most important services. God will hear thy prayer, and respect thy faith. It was not by the sword, but by the simple exercise of faith, that three confederate armies were totally destroyed. Fight then with the same weapon: entreat your God to direct the counsels of our governors, and to prosper their endeavours; and we shall yet have fresh evidence, that the injunction in our text was never given or obeyed in vain.]

2. As members of the Church—

[Far be it from us to express indifference respecting good works. We know you must abound in them; and we desire you should abound in them to the glory of God. But they can proceed from nothing but a living principle of faith; and therefore, from a regard to the interests of morality, we repeat the exhortation in the text. It is not by self-righteous, self-confident exertions that you are to become holy, but by exercising faith in Him, who is our "righteousness and our strength." Live then by faith on the Son of God; so shall you derive from him all needful supplies of grace, and progressively advance, both in an enjoyment of his presence and a meetness for his glory.]

CCCCXII.

THE DANGER OF FOLLOWING EVIL COUNSEL.

2 Chron. xxii. 3, 4. *He walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab: for they were his counsellors after the death of his father to his destruction.*

THOUGH Jehovah is undoubtedly the Governor of the universe, it is certain that there is a mighty being always exerting himself in opposition to him; and with such great apparent success, as to be justly designated "the god of this world." In the contest that is maintained between them, each has, if I may so speak, his partisans and agents, who, under their respective heads, labour to execute their master's will, and to promote the interest of him to whom they belong. Jehovah employs holy men, whose hearts he has touched with his heavenly grace; and whom he sends forth as his ambassadors, to instruct our fallen race, and to rescue them from the dominion of the great usurper. Satan, on the other hand, has his servants also, whom he employs to deceive mankind, and to rivet on them the chains with which they are already bound. In this, however, he differs from that Almighty Power against whom he is arrayed; that, whereas Jehovah delights to make use of the weakest instruments, and "by things which are not, to bring to nought things that are," Satan is constrained to select the most powerful agents to carry on his cause; well knowing that, without them, he has no hope of effecting any thing. When, in his efforts to rob Job of his integrity, he destroyed all his children, he forbore to destroy the wife of Job, that by her means he might tempt that holy man to "curse God and die." When he would divert the Lord Jesus Christ from his purpose to redeem the world, he employed the Apostle Peter to dissuade him from subjecting himself to the sufferings that were to come upon him. Thus he acted in reference

to the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Judah. Jehoshaphat was a pious king, and served Jehovah faithfully. But Satan wished to reduce Judah, as well as Israel, to idolatry; and, for this end, stirred up Jehoram's wife to tempt him to it^a, and afterwards to give the same impious counsel to her son Ahaziah; thereby leading both of them "to their destruction."

The history before us will naturally lead me to point out,

I. The influence of evil counsel—

Good counsel, alas! has, for the most part, but little effect. We cannot doubt but that Samuel, knowing as he did the bitter consequences which a want of parental authority had entailed on Eli, was careful to instruct his children in the ways of God, and to reprove in them the first appearances of evil. But, notwithstanding all his efforts, his sons turned aside from the paths of judgment, and rendered the very government of Jehovah himself odious in the eyes of all Israel^b. Nor can we doubt but that Jehoshaphat, though in some respects faulty, strove to maintain the authority of Jehovah in his family. But his sons were more easily led to imitate his errors than his piety. He himself had joined in an alliance with Ahab, and had consented to a marriage of his son with Ahab's daughter, whose counsels weighed both with her husband and her son far more than any advice of his: yea, though God had signally interposed to thwart his efforts, when combined with those of Ahab, his son and grandson courted the same alliance, and brought on themselves, and on all connected with them, the heaviest judgments^c.

But let us mark this matter more distinctly,

1. In the case before us—

[To what was it that Ahaziah's mother tempted him? It was to idolatry. But can we conceive that the counsel of any one, however dear, should have power to draw a person to *idolatry*? yea, that it should prevail with a person who had

^a 2 Kings xxi. 6.

^b 1 Sam. viii. 1--5.

^c 1 Kings xx. 35--37. with xxi. 14, 15. and xxii. 4.

been educated in the knowledge of the one true God? Hear the account given of idolaters by the Prophet Hosea: "My people ask counsel of *their stocks*, and *their staff* declareth unto them." Can we conceive it possible that any person who had heard of all the wonders which Jehovah had wrought for his people in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and in Canaan, should ever be seduced to such infatuation as *this*? Of ignorant savages we may imagine any thing: but of God's own peculiar people, and of him who was at the head of them, the grandson of the pious Jehoshaphat, we cannot believe it! or the apostate must at least have been bereft of reason. Alas! not so: the man has his mother for his counsellor; and her advice is quite sufficient to draw him from the Most High God to the worship of stocks and stones! I say again, if this fact were not attested on the authority of God himself, we could not credit it; we could not conceive it possible that evil counsel should possess such an influence as *this*.]

2. In our own case—

[It is well known how generally the rising generation are counselled by their friends and relatives to follow the world rather than God, and to attend to the concerns of time rather than those of eternity. I speak not here respecting any particular doctrines of religion which may be supposed to have an injurious effect, and *therefore* to be an object of jealousy: but I speak of all serious religion, irrespective of any peculiar doctrine: I speak of the fear of God; of a holy anxiety about the soul; about a diligent preparation for death and judgment. Of these things, *speculatively considered*, every one professes to approve: yet no sooner does any person begin to experience them in his soul, than his own dearest friends, his mother, his wife, his sister, his "friend that is as his own soul," will begin to caution him against being "righteous over-much," or, in other words, against being righteous *at all*. If the person reply, 'But I have a soul; and it will be called into judgment, and be doomed either to heaven or hell, according to the state in which it is found: and should I not prepare for that great account?' the answer will be, 'No; you have no need to fear: only do as others around you, and you have nothing to be afraid of: God will never enter into judgment with persons who live as you have done.' Thus all the most blessed counsels of Jehovah are set at nought — — —^d and poor fallible men will set their word against the word of Jehovah, and will assure those of ultimate impunity, whom God, in the most solemn manner, dooms to everlasting perdition.

^d Isai. lv. 1—3. Rev. iii. 18. These should be cited, with a short comment.

But can it be supposed that any one will follow such counsel, and be led by it to prefer the body to the soul, the creature to the Creator, time to eternity, and hell to heaven? It cannot surely be, that any one in his senses can be so influenced, either by friends or enemies. Methinks, the answer that would instantly be given to all such counsellors would be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." But there are few, very few, in whom this fortitude is found. And if a person can only say, My father or "my mother so counselled me," he will cease to think that he "does wickedly," or that he has reason to fear the displeasure of his God.]

But let me faithfully warn you of,

II. The danger of following it—

This unhappy king was soon made to feel the bitter consequences of his folly: for God "fixed his eyes upon him for evil," and in one short year brought him down "to his destruction." His end, in this view, is worthy of notice. He went with Jehoram, the son of Ahab, to fight against Hazael, king of Syria. Being wounded in the battle, he went to Jezreel, to be healed of his wounds. Whilst he was there, on a visit to Jehoram, king of Israel, he went forth with Jehoram to inquire into the reason of the apparently hostile approach of Jehu: and finding Jehu too powerful for him, and his friend the king of Israel slain by him, he fled to Samaria, and hid himself there: but, being found, he was taken, and brought to Jehu, and put to death. And all this was ordered of the Lord, as we are expressly told: "The destruction of Ahaziah was of God, by coming to Joram*." In like manner will every one find, that in "contemning God's counsel," he only ensures his own destruction†.

In two ways will a compliance with evil counsel operate to a man's destruction:

1. By the habits which it will induce—

[A person, in yielding to evil counsel, thinks perhaps, that he will only follow it on a particular occasion, or to a given extent. But who shall say where a man on a precipitous

* ver. 5—9.

† Ps. cvii. 11.

descent shall stop? Perhaps the advice given was only to avoid singularity; and, for this end, to avoid the ministry of those who might awaken his conscience, or the society of those who might lead him to God. By following this advice, he is kept from attaining a principle of true piety, which alone can preserve him from any evil. He loves not the word of God; and therefore he employs his leisure in some foolish vanity: he has no pleasure in communion with God; and therefore he associates with those who are like-minded with himself: he affects not heaven; and therefore is satisfied with the things of time and sense.

It may be, that he is never particularly tempted to the commission of any flagrant evil; and therefore he goes on respectably in the eyes of the world; but without any real delight in God, or any serious preparation for eternity: but if he be tried by any violent temptation, he is carried away, like the dust before the wind, and falls a prey to his great enemy. Behold the gambler, the adulterer, the duellist! each, in his calling, was deemed a man of worth, till, by his want of principle, he was betrayed into the evils by which he fell. But had he, in the first instance, listened, not to the counsels of ungodly men, but to the voice of God in his word, he had escaped the snares which were laid for his feet, and avoided the destruction that has come upon his soul. Nor is it into occasional sin only that men are drawn by a want of religious principle, but frequently into a contempt for all religion; as the Psalmist intimates, when, in a *triple climax*, he describes a man, first "*walking* (transiently) in the *counsel* of the *ungodly* (who have no vital piety); then *standing* in the *way* of *sinners*; and, at last, *sitting* in the *seat* of the *scornful*."]

2. By the judgments which it will entail—

[Men may promise us impunity in the ways of sin: but it shall be found, at last, "whose words shall stand, theirs or God's^b." God has said, "Evil shall hunt the wicked man, to overthrow himⁱ." The hunted deer thinks himself at a distance from any enemy, and that he has no ground for fear: but his step has left a scent behind him; and that, once found, is traced with fatal precision, till he is overtaken, and destroyed. So the judgments of God, at whatever distance they may be thought to be, follow the sinner, till at last "his sin finds him out^k," and brings down the wrath of an offended God upon him. In vain may he "make a covenant with death and hell: his covenant with death shall be disannulled; and his agreement with hell shall not stand: when the overflowing scourge shall

^a Ps. i. 1.

ⁱ Ps. cxl. 11.

^b Jer. xlv. 28.

^k Numb. xxxii. 23.

pass through, he shall be trodden down by it¹:" yea, "though hand join in hand," and there be a confederacy of the whole universe for his protection, "he shall not be unpunished^m." "Let no man deceive himself: God is not mocked; nor will be: for whatsoever any man soweth, that shall he also reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: and he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlastingⁿ."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are exerting their influence against the Lord—

[Who has not, at one time or other, been guilty of this sin? Who has not either derided serious piety himself, or forborne to vindicate it when derided by others, and thus sanctioned, by silence at least, the counsel of the ungodly? We may think lightly of this evil: but the rebuke given to Peter, when, from a love to his Master, he would have dissuaded him from suffering, shews clearly enough the light in which our conduct has been viewed by Almighty God. In every such act we have taken part with the devil, and done his work: and we may well expect to hear from him that indignant reproof, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Consider, then, I pray you, Brethren, what you are doing, when you "counsel any one to do wickedly," or to refrain from obeying any command of God: you "cast a stumbling-block before your brother, and destroy a soul for whom Christ died^o." You also bring the deepest guilt upon your own soul; and will have the blood of those, whom you have ruined, required at your hands. Reflect a moment on the state to which both you and those who have followed your advice will soon be reduced. It is said that the wicked will be "bound in bundles, and cast into the fire^p." By this I understand, that they who have encouraged each other in sin will be so brought into contact with each other in the eternal world, as to increase each other's torment to all eternity by their mutual recriminations. The mother will then execrate the folly that her son committed in listening to her counsels, in opposition to the word of God; whilst the son will cast the most bitter reflections on her, for so abusing her influence to the ruin of his soul. Let these considerations be laid to heart by those who imagine that they are only exercising love: for verily it is such a love as Satan himself

¹ Isai. xxviii. 18.

^m Prov. xi. 21.

ⁿ Gal. vi. 7, 8.

^o Rom. xiv. 15.

^p Matt. xiii. 30.

approves; and such a love as all, who either exercise it or obey it, will bitterly bewail.]

2. Those who yield to influence so exerted—

[Do not imagine, that, in guarding you against a compliance with the counsels of a wife, a mother, a sister, a friend, I would willingly interrupt the harmony of the domestic circle, and still less that I would lessen in your eyes the obligations of parental authority. No: in every thing that is not contrary to God's commands, parental authority ought to be regarded with the deepest veneration, and obeyed with the greatest readiness. To honour our parents is "the first command with promise:" and the blessing of God will always come on those who duly respect it. But there is an authority paramount to that of any creature; and our blessed Lord has expressly told us that no creature under heaven must be put in competition with him: "He that loveth father or mother, or son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me^q." It will be no excuse that you have yielded either to the endearments or authority of love, if, in so doing, you have violated any command of God, or withheld from him any service which you might have rendered. Let it be granted, that, in withstanding the solicitations of your friends, you grieve and offend them: is it not better than to grieve and offend your God? Or, if by means of it you suffer the loss of an earthly inheritance, is not that a better alternative than to lose your own soul? for, "what shall a man take in exchange for his soul?" Learn, then, Beloved, to regard, in the first place, the commands of God. Learn to seek, above all things, his favour; for "in his favour is life;" and "his loving-kindness is better than life itself." If the advice given you be good, you will do well to follow it, as Timothy did that of his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice^r:" but if it be evil, "We ought to obey God rather than men^s," must be the principle to which you must inviolably adhere.]

^q Matt. x. 37.

^r 2 Tim. i. 5.

^s Acts v. 29.

CCCCXIII.

THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JOASH.

2 Chron. xxiv. 2. *And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.*

IN order to display more fully his own truth and faithfulness, God often permits events to arise, which seem to render the accomplishment of his promises

almost, if not altogether, hopeless. This was particularly visible in his conduct towards the posterity of Abraham in Egypt, in that he forbore to rescue them from their captivity, till the period assigned for their deliverance was brought to the very last hour. We behold a striking interposition also in behalf of the descendants of David, to whom God had promised, that his seed should continue to sit upon the throne of Judah. More than once had they been in imminent danger of utter excision^a, before Athaliah usurped the throne: and she was bent upon destroying them all^b: but God would not suffer his promise to fail^c. It should seem that Joash, the youngest son of Ahaziah, was actually with his brethren when they all were slain, and by some means, being only an infant, was hid amongst them, so as to escape the general slaughter. From that state he was rescued by his aunt, and was hid, together with his nurse, in a bed-chamber^d, till he was seven years old: at which time Jehoiada the priest, who had married his aunt, put to death the usurper, and established Joash on his father's throne.

One might have hoped, that a person so signally preserved, should, like Moses, have proved a great blessing to his age and nation: but, hopeful as his beginnings were, his reign was evil, and his end calamitous.

We propose,

I. To take a brief view of his history—

A sudden and total change having taken place in his conduct about the middle of his reign, it will be proper to consider his history,

1. During the life of Jehoiada—

[At first, as might be expected, he was under the entire management of Jehoiada, who was his instructor, and acted towards him as a father^e. But it was not only during his minority that he was thus observant of Jehoiada, but for many years

^a 2 Chron. xxi. 4. and xxii. 1. ^b 2 Chron. xxii. 10.

^c 2 Chron. xxi. 7. ^d 2 Kings xi. 2.

^e 2 Kings xii. 1. with 2 Chron. xxiv. 22.

after he had attained to manhood, even as long as Jehoiada himself lived. Now in this we admire his *humility*; for he was a king, possessed of arbitrary power; and yet, because he was convinced of the skill, the integrity, and the piety of his instructor, he still continued to consult him on all occasions, and to follow his advice without reserve. In this conduct also he evinced his *wisdom*; in that he preferred the sage advice of an experienced counsellor, before the less matured dictates of his own mind, or the judgment of sycophants around his throne. Even *piety* itself seems to have possessed his mind at this period: for when he saw to what a dilapidated state the temple was reduced by the impious rage of Athaliah^f, he set himself to repair it; and even reproved Jehoiada himself, and all the Levites, for their tardiness in executing this important work^g.

Who from such beginnings would not augur well of the remainder of his reign? From such a view of him we are ready to say, 'O that our princes, our nobility, our youth of every rank, were thus observant of pious instructors, thus intent on "doing what was right in the sight of the Lord!"']

But our views of Joash will be greatly changed, if we consider his history—

2. After Jehoiada's decease—

[Instantly did a mighty change appear in him. Having lost his pious counsellor, he began to listen to the advice of young unprincipled sycophants^h. O what a misfortune is it to any man to connect himself with ungodly associates! How many are there, who, whilst under the care of pious parents or godly instructors, have promised well, who yet, by means of ungodly companions, have been drawn from every good way, and been led to disappoint all the hopes that have been formed concerning them! We cannot too earnestly caution all against the influence of bad advice, by whomsoever it be given, even though it be by their nearest friends or relativesⁱ. Every counsel must be tried by the unerring word of God; and to those who would lead us in opposition to that, our answer must invariably be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."

Released, as it were, from the restraints of *man*, he soon cast off all fear of *God*, and abandoned his temple and service for the service of groves and idols^k. Nor, when God sent him prophets to testify against his evil ways, would he regard them at all: yea, when Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada himself, was sent to him, instead of attending to his admonitions, he

^f ver. 7.

^g ver. 5, 6.

^h ver. 17.

ⁱ 2 Chron. xxii. 3, 4.

^k ver. 18.

gave commandment to the people to stone him to death; which commandment they executed, even in the court of the temple itself.

To what excesses will not men run, when once they give ear to ungodly counsellors, and knowingly violate all the dictates of their own conscience! It not unfrequently happens, that backsliders and apostates become the bitterest persecutors; and that they who "*walk in the counsel of the ungodly*, soon learn to *stand* in the way of *sinners*, and come at last to *sit* in the seat of the *scornful*¹."

We wonder not at the melancholy end to which these transgressions brought him. Within the short space of a year was he, notwithstanding "his very great host," subdued by "a small company of Syrians," who destroyed all the princes, his advisers, and sent the spoil of the city and temple to Damascus^m: and Joash himself, being seized with multiplied disorders, was assassinated in his bed by two of his own servants". Unhappy man! yet more unhappy still, if we contemplate the fearful state to which he was driven from the presence of his offended God. But such is the end which, if not in this world, certainly in the world to come, awaits those who "leave off to behave themselves wisely," and "turn from the holy commandment delivered to them."]

Let us, from this brief view of his history, proceed,
II. To make some reflections on his character—

From his character *in its commencement*, we observe,
How great is the benefit of a pious education!

[From what appeared in his latter days, we may judge what he would have been, if he had been left to himself in early life. What pernicious habits would he have contracted, and what multiplied evils would he have perpetrated! Instead of doing for several years "what was right in the sight of the Lord," it is probable that he would have "done evil from his youth." To be restrained from such enormities, was a mercy both to himself and to the whole nation. That he turned this blessing afterwards to a curse, is deeply to be lamented; though the proper tendency of a pious education is not a whit the less apparent. Let all be thankful for the advice given them, and the restraints imposed upon them in early life. Little do any of us know to what an extent of wickedness we might have been carried, if these admonitions or corrections, which were once irksome and painful to us, had not been administered. Indeed the more irksome such restraints appear to us, the more reason we have to be thankful for them; since the very im-

¹ Ps. i. 1.

^m ver. 23, 24.

ⁿ ver. 25.

patience which we feel, demonstrates clearly our need of them. An aversion to them argues a disposition that is hateful and ruinous^o: and those who, from an undue tenderness, neglect to reprove their children, lay up sorrow for themselves, as well as for the objects of their ill-judged lenity^p. Let parents consider, that they are accountable to God for the authority vested in them, and for the talents committed to their care: and let them remember, that if it is not *always* found that "a child trained in the way he should go will not in more advanced life depart from it," yet it is *generally* true; and that such a promise affords ample encouragement for their most strenuous exertions.]

From his character *toward the close of life*, we observe, *How awful is the state of those, who, after hopeful beginnings, turn aside from the paths of piety and virtue!*

[In one view, it is a blessing to have been kept from evil for a time; but in another view, the instructions that have been given us, the convictions we have felt, and the obedience we have rendered to the voice of God, will serve but to aggravate the guilt of our subsequent misconduct, and to bring upon us an accumulated weight of misery. As the instructions given by our Lord to the Jews served only to enhance their guilt, and render their state in the future world "less tolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrha," so all our advantages, professions, and attainments, will, if renounced, make "our latter end worse than our beginning: for it were better never to have known the way of righteousness, than after we have known it to depart from it^q." Whilst this thought primarily applies to those who, like Joash, have burst through the restraints of education, it speaks powerfully to those who have turned back from a religious course, and relapsed into a state of worldliness and sin. To what they will come at last, God alone knows: but the downward road is very precipitous; and they who provoke the Holy Spirit to depart from them, will most probably go on from bad to worse; till, having filled up the measure of their iniquities, they be made distinguished monuments of God's righteous indignation.]

From his whole history in *a collective view*, we observe, *How necessary divine grace is to produce any radical change of heart and life!*

[Education may change the exterior conduct, but the

^o Prov. xii. 1. and xv. 5, 10, 31, 32.

^p Prov. xxix. 15.

^q 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

heart will remain the same: and when the restraints that operated at first are removed, the dispositions of the mind will break forth into outward act. The lamp which is not supplied with oil, will go out at last; and, not uncommonly, the restraint which obstructed the stream of nature for a while, will, like a dam broke down, give occasion for the greater and more fatal inundation. Nothing but the grace of God can convert the soul: and every change, short of true conversion, will but deceive us to our eternal ruin. The redeeming love of Christ must be felt in the soul: nothing but that will have a constraining efficacy to renew and sanctify us after the divine image. Whatever therefore any may have done in compliance with the advice of others, know, that we must have a principle of life within ourselves, and “be renewed in the spirit of our minds,” and be “new creatures in Christ Jesus:” “Old things must pass away, and all things become new.” Nothing but *this* change will prove effectual for a consistent walk; nor without this can we ever behold the face of God in peace.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those to whom the care of young persons is intrusted—

[Whether you are parents, or instructors only, be not discouraged because you see not all the fruit that you could wish: but continue to sow in hope; for you know not which attempt shall prosper, or when the Angel at Bethesda's pool shall make your labours of love effectual.]

2. Those who are yet under the authority or instruction of others—

[Do not think hardly of the restraints imposed upon you: they are all salutary, and intended for your good; and the day is coming when you will see reason to bless your God for those very things which are now irksome to you. Your advancement in all that is good is the richest recompence your instructors can receive: and, in repaying them, you will greatly enrich yourselves.]

CCCCXIV.

THE RE-OPENING OF THE TEMPLE BY KING JEHOASH.

2 Chron. xxiv. 14. *And they offered burnt-offerings in the house of the Lord continually all the days of Jehoiada.*

THE temple of God, which “had been broken up” and “made desolate” by the sons of Athaliah, was

now repaired and opened by King Jehoash. Long had he laboured to attain this object: but the priests and Levites were averse to it, insomuch that for three-and-twenty years he was unable to accomplish this desired measure^a. At last he reprov'd even Jehoiada himself, his relative, his preceptor, and the very man to whom, under God, he owed both his life and his crown; yes, even him and all the priests that were under him did this young king reprove, for being intent only on their own interests, whilst they utterly neglected the house of God^b. As for the priests, they would have waved their own gains, if only they might be excused the trouble of advancing the honour of their God^c. But Jehoiada devised an expedient, which, whilst it relieved the priests from a part of their burthens, gave to the people generally an opportunity of shewing what their wishes were in relation to this matter. He made "a chest, with a hole in the lid;" and put it beside the altar, to receive the gifts which should be voluntarily contributed for the furtherance of this good work^d: and God so wrought on the hearts of the people, that a sufficiency was soon obtained; so that the temple being repaired, they could resume with comfort the worship of their God^e.

In my text there are two things to be noticed:

I. The reformation made—

Of course, the temple being desolated, the service of it would be neglected. Now, therefore, when the repairs of the temple were completed, the service of it was resumed.

Of all the sacrifices that were presented to God, those of burnt-offerings were the most ancient and dignified—

[This was the offering which procured for Abel such a manifest token of God's approbation and acceptance^f. And whereas it is said that "Abel offered it by faith^g," it seems

^a 2 Kings xii. 6.

^d 2 Kings xii. 9.

^f Gen. iv. 4, 5.

^b 2 Kings xii. 7.

^e 2 Chron. xxiv. 11—13.

^g Heb. xi. 4.

^c 2 Kings xii. 8.

that it *must* have been of divine appointment; and most probably was appointed immediately after the Fall, when beasts were slain, and our first parents were clothed with their skins^h. Under the Mosaic economy, they were offered every morning and every evening throughout the year; and on the Sabbath-day they were doubled: and, being entirely consumed upon the altar, they were peculiarly fitted to represent the desert of men on account of sin, and the sufferings of Christ in their behalf.

Consider them in this point of view. Behold a spotless victim slain, and his body consumed upon the altar, as a sacrifice for the sins of men! methinks, the offerer could not but see that death was his deserved portion, even the second death in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. At the same time, viewing this sacrifice as a typical representation of the Lord Jesus, what an idea does it convey of his sufferings under the curse due to sin, even the wrath of an avenging God! Surely it was a most instructive ordinance: and, being repeated "continually," the people enjoyed the full benefit of the Mosaic dispensation, and God was glorified in the midst of them.]

Amongst you, also, the same sacrifice is now renewed—

[The Jews possessed the shadow; but you enjoy the substance. In the Gospel that is ministered unto you the same truths are held forth, but with infinitely clearer evidence, and more consoling power. You are told that you deserve the wrath of God, not by a mere shadowy exhibition, but by a faithful statement of your sins, and an explicit declaration of God's threatened vengeance against you. You are informed, also, that there is mercy for you through the intervention of a Saviour, who has offered himself a sacrifice for your sins: but you have not to see this held forth under the image of a slain beast: you are instructed, that the Son of the living God himself has become incarnate: that, having approved himself spotless, and been acknowledged to be so even by his most inveterate enemies, he offered himself a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour, and has been accepted in your behalf; so that all who believe in him may henceforth be justified from all things. These two great doctrines, of your own personal desert of punishment, and of your redemption through Christ, are "continually" set before you. Whatever be the immediate subject of discourse, these are either taken for granted as acknowledged truths, or are rendered prominent, as the occasion may require. These truths every minister of our Church is

^h Gen. iii. 21.

bound to make the "continual" subjects of his ministration: and I thank God, that, from the first moment that I ever ministered among you, "I determined to know no other!"

But, if we rejoice at the reformation made, our joy is damped by what is spoken of,

II. The term of its continuance—

It was only "during the days of Jehoiada" that this reformation continued—

[King Jehoash had, from his infancy, been instructed by Jehoiada; and during the life of that aged priest he was kept steadfast in the ways of God^k. But no sooner was that pious monitor removed, than Jehoash listened to the voice of evil counsellors, deserted the worship of his God, and abandoned himself to idolatry^l; yea, and slew the very son of Jehoiada, whom God had sent to remonstrate with him and reclaim him^m. What an awful picture does this give us of human nature! But, in every age, man has shewn himself prone to depart from the living God. Moses warned the Israelites, that, after his departure, they would, notwithstanding all the wonders that had been wrought for them, forsake the Lordⁿ. Even St. Paul himself, whose ministrations were so powerful, foresaw that, after his removal, the good work which he had begun amongst the Ephesian elders would be greatly impeded, and that many among them, who had run well for a season, would be hindered in their way, and be turned at last from the faith which they had professed: "I know this," says he, "that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore WATCH: and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears^o."]

And who shall say how long the work that has been begun amongst *you* shall continue?—

[It is not three, but three and forty, years, that I have had the happiness of watching over you, and of endeavouring, according to the grace given me, to advance your spiritual welfare^p. But I tremble to think how soon the instructions now given you may be forgotten, and the hopeful appearances among you may vanish. But, as St. Peter says, "I will not be negligent to put you in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth: yea,

^l 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^k 2 Kings xii. 2.

^l ver. 17, 18.

^m ver. 20—22.

ⁿ Deut. xxxi. 27, 29.

^o Acts xx. 29—31.

^p Preached in Sept. 1825.

I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover, *I will endeavour that you may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance^a.*"

Know, then, that ye are sinners, deserving of the wrath of God — — — But know, that "God has laid help for you upon one that is mighty;" and that, through the sacrifice which Christ has offered for you on the cross, every one of you may obtain both pardon and peace — — — Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ is both "able and willing to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him;" and, "of those who come to him, not so much as one shall ever be cast out" — — — O, treasure up these truths in your hearts; for "they are your very life^r." Without the knowledge of them you never can be saved: and with the *experimental* knowledge of them in your souls you can never perish. Seek, then, to realize them more and more in your secret chamber; that, whether he who now ministers them unto you be alive or not, you may have the comfort of them in your own souls, and find them, as ye most assuredly shall, "the power of God to your everlasting salvation^s."]]

^a 2 Pet. i. 12—15.

^r Deut. xxxii. 46, 47.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 2. Rom. i. 16.

CCCCXV.

AMAZIAH'S CONFLICT BETWEEN DUTY AND INTEREST.

2 Chron. xxv. 9. *And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give thee much more than this.*

IT is humiliating to reflect, that more attention was often paid to the messengers of the Most High by ungodly men under the Jewish dispensation, than is generally paid to them even by the godly in the present day. At one time we read of a whole army stopped and disbanded by one single declaration of a prophet^a. At another time, a great national reformation was effected by the very same means^b. In like manner, when Amaziah king of Judah was

^a 1 Kings xii. 21—24.

^b 2 Chron. xv. 8—15.

going with an army of four hundred thousand men against the Edomites, one word from a man of God prevailed on him to dismiss one fourth of their number, because, as being idolaters, they were under the displeasure of the Most High. He was indeed concerned about the subsidy which he had paid them for their assistance: but that only serves to shew more strongly what implicit obedience he was disposed to pay to the commands of God, when he could so easily be induced to sacrifice his temporal interests, and to release from their obligations so large a portion of his army. The difficulty however which he started, and the solution of that difficulty by the prophet, deserve particular attention. Let us consider,

I. The difficulty started—

Amaziah had hired one hundred thousand Israelites as auxiliaries in this war, and had paid the money for their equipment; and, when he was required to discharge them, he naturally concluded that he should lose all that he had advanced. Hence he expressed to the prophet the difficulty that was in his mind. Now,

This is a common difficulty in the minds of men—

[Circumstances of necessity will sometimes arise, where duty and interest appear to clash with each other. Sometimes they actually exist, as in the instance before us; and sometimes they are only apprehended as likely to exist. It sometimes happens that a person has been placed by his parents in a line of business where he cannot get a livelihood without continually violating the laws of the land and the dictates of his conscience. What is to be done in such a case? His property is embarked; and cannot be disposed of without a considerable loss. And shall that be done? Shall such a sacrifice be made to God? It is desirable indeed to maintain a conscience void of offence; but is it to be done at such an expense?

It sometimes happens also that a person is educated for the ministry, with certain expectation of preferment: but when the time for his ordination arrives, he finds no disposition for the holy employment, no real determination to give himself wholly to the service of the sanctuary. What then shall he do? To go to God with a lie in his right hand, and profess that he is moved by the Holy Ghost to take on himself that sacred function, when

he is moved only by the temporal advantages annexed to it, is very painful : and to contract a responsibility for the souls of hundreds and of thousands, when he has scarcely any concern about his own, appears to him a very dangerous step. But what must be done? He has been educated for it : he finds it difficult to turn to any other line : and, above all, the provision designed for him will be lost : and how can these difficulties be surmounted?

When the evils are in prospect only, their operation is exactly the same. One man feels that it is his duty to become a faithful follower of Christ. But his parents will be offended ; his friends will be alienated : his prospects in life will be destroyed : and how can he endure to make such sacrifices as these? A few pence he would readily lose ; but the loss of so many talents would be ruinous ; and he knows not how to combat evils of such magnitude as this.]

But the difficulty referred to would be no difficulty, if only we viewed things in their true light—

[If we should suppose an angel sent down to sojourn for a time on earth, would he find any hesitation whether to prefer his interest or his duty? Nor did the Apostle Paul hesitate even when life itself was at stake : “ I am ready,” says he, “ not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Lord’s sake.” Nor should we find any difficulty if we formed a proper estimate of things around us. Should we regard our temporal interests, if we reflected on the extreme emptiness and vanity of every thing here below? Should we hesitate in our choice of evils, if we considered the impossibility of ever being acknowledged by Christ, without forsaking all, even life itself, for him? Above all, would we suffer the whole world to stand in competition with Christ, if we considered what wonderful things he has done and suffered for us? — — — Verily, the loss of all things compared with the loss of his favour, would be only as a feather in a scale against a talent of lead ; and, like Paul, we should “ count all things but loss, that we might win Christ ;” and instead of repining at the injuries sustained, should regard them rather as grounds of mutual congratulation ; saying with St. Paul, “ If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all : for the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me.”]

But we cannot suggest a better view of this matter than that which is contained in our text ; in which we have,

II. The difficulty solved—

We are contented that men should lean to the side of interest, if only they will consider wherein their true interest consists. If God cannot do more for them than the world can, let them seek the world; or, if he cannot compensate all that they can lose or suffer for him, let them seek the world. But we fear not to say, whatever be the sacrifice which they make for him, "The Lord is able to give thee much more than this;"

1. In this world—

[It is a certain truth, that God does often recompense the services or sufferings of his people even with worldly prosperity: "Godliness hath in this respect the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come"^d.] This very consideration is urged by God himself as a motive to charity^e: and our text suggests it as an argument for submitting cheerfully to losses in the path of duty. And it is curious to observe, that the loss sustained by Amaziah in obedience to God's command, was not only recompensed by present victory, but was restored in a three-fold proportion to his grandson Jotham; the same sum being paid to him for three successive years by the Ammonites, which Amaziah his grandfather sacrificed to the Lord on this occasion^f. But it is not three, or thirty-fold that *we* are to expect, but "*an hundred-fold*" of whatever we sacrifice for the Lord^g: and is not this an ample compensation?

It is true, the Israelites whom he dismissed on this occasion did him great injury in their return home^h: and this might almost seem to contradict the promise in our text: but we apprehend that this very circumstance was permitted by God, on purpose to shew Amaziah how great a ruin he had been delivered from; since these Israelites were not hearty in his cause, and would have turned against him when once they saw the Edomites prevail, and would thus have utterly completed his destruction. Other reasons might be assigned for this dispensation: it might be supposed to be a punishment on Amaziah for hesitating to obey the divine mandate, and for placing his interest in competition with his duty: or it might be intended to guard him against the idolatry into which he was about to fall, by suffering the most idolatrous part of his own dominions to participate in the judgments inflicted on the

^d 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^f ver. 11. with 2 Chron. xxvii. 5.

^h ver. 13.

^e Prov. iii. 9, 10.

^g Mark x. 29, 30.

Edomites. But we apprehend, that the reason first assigned, is that which was more immediately in the mind of God, when he permitted so dark and mysterious a judgment to fall on one who was obedient to his command, yea to arise, as it were, out of that very obedience.

But, waving all consideration of temporal recompence, God can infinitely more than counterbalance all temporal losses by the richer effusion of his Spirit on the soul. If he suffer us to be deprived of earthly wealth, are we any losers, if he communicate to us a proportionable increase of spiritual riches? Cannot he, by the consolations of his Spirit, raise us far above all temporal distresses, and, by opening a prospect beyond the grave, make us to rejoice and glory in all the sufferings that can be inflicted on us here? Behold the Apostle Paul, how he "took pleasure in infirmities, and reproaches, and necessities, and persecutions, and distresses, for Christ's sake," because they tended to his spiritual welfare¹: and others, his companions, "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance²." Thus may we expect it to be with us in this world: "if our afflictions abound, so shall also our consolation abound by Christ;" and the very sense of having sought the glory of God will make every pain a pleasure, and every loss a gain.]

2. In the world to come—

[“If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him:” and who can declare the full import of that promise? Truly, the reward that awaits the faithful followers of Christ hereafter, no words can express, no imagination can conceive. It will be in vain to attempt any description of the glory and felicity of heaven: but I will ask, Whether one single plaudit from our Judge will not overbalance all that we can either do or suffer in a hundred years? How indignant shall we be in that day, to think that we permitted the things of time and sense to warp our judgment, or embarrass our practice! One glimpse of the Saviour's glory will repay whole years of trouble: and no sooner shall we be received into his bosom, than we shall adore him for every trial that weaned us from the world, and for every loss that facilitated our progress towards the heavenly kingdom. Let us only take eternity into our estimate, and we shall instantly say with the Apostle, “I reckon (I compute) that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us¹.”]

¹ 2 Cor. xii. 10. ² Heb. x. 34. ¹ Rom. viii. 18.

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are yet undecided in the course they shall take—

[Strongly as we have condemned the conduct of Amaziah for hesitating between the calls of interest and of duty, we yet will venture to propose him as an example, *changing only the object of your concern*. Are you tempted to violate a duty, or to draw back from suffering, ask yourselves immediately, 'But what shall I do for the favour of my God? what shall I do for the peace of my conscience? what shall I do for the salvation of my soul? How can I bear the loss of all these?' Let, I say, your hesitation be *on this side*: let the consideration of your *eternal* interests rise in your mind as instinctively and forcibly, as that of *temporal* interests does in the mind of a worldling: and then we shall have no fear but that your obedience to God's word will be prompt, uniform, and unreserved. You will "buy the truth" at *any* price, "and never sell it" for a thousand worlds.]

2. Those who have been enabled to give up all for Christ—

[Whatever you may have lost or suffered, have you ever for a moment repented of the sacrifices you have made? No: if your hearts are right with God, you will feel yourselves indebted to God in proportion to the losses you have sustained for him; seeing that the privilege of suffering for him is an inestimable gift^m, and the highest honour that can be conferred upon a child of man". Go on then, Beloved, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might:" and let it be seen in you, that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth," but that "in God's favour is life;" and that, with "his love shed abroad in your heart," "though you have nothing, you are yet possessing all things^o."]

^m Phil. i. 29.

ⁿ Acts v. 41. 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.

^o 2 Cor. vi. 10.

CCCCXVI.

THE SIN AND DANGER OF DESPISING GOD'S COUNSEL.

2 Chron. xxv. 16. *And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldst thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbore, and said, I know that God hath determined*

to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened to my counsel.

WHEREVER "the heart is not perfect with God," a compliance with the divine will may be occasional and partial, but it never can be uniform and unreserved: when circumstances occur that require the sacrifice of a bosom lust, the heart will rise against the commandment, and trample under foot the authority of God himself. Herod would comply in some things with the injunctions of John the Baptist, but, when a separation from Herodias was insisted on, he broke through all the restraints of conscience, and inflicted death on his monitor as the penalty of his fidelity. Not unlike to Herod was King Amaziah; who obeyed the voice of a prophet requiring him to dismiss his hired troops, and to rely on God to compensate his loss, but was filled with indignation against one who expostulated with him on the subject of his idolatry. It should seem, that in proportion as a man is degraded in his own eyes by the conduct reproved, he will, if not truly penitent, swell with resentment against the person that undertakes to reprove him. The hiring of troops to augment his army appeared a prudent and commendable measure: but to take for his gods those worthless idols, over whom he himself had prevailed, was folly in the extreme. Hence, when reproved for it, he burst forth into a rage, and quickly terminated his conference with the inspired messenger.

From hence we shall take occasion to shew

I. What is the conduct of the generality in reference to the counsels of God—

God still, as formerly, sends his servants to testify against prevailing iniquities; and still, as heretofore, are his messages rejected. In Amaziah we see a striking picture of rebellious man—

[Nothing could be more just than the reproof given him. To renounce Jehovah, who had interposed so wonderfully in his behalf, and to substitute in his place those idols which had not been able to protect their own votaries, was an infatuation, of which we should scarcely have conceived him capable. Yet

behold how he resented the prophet's expostulation! He regarded the admonition as an insult, and as an interference with his royal prerogative; as though God himself was not at liberty to counsel *him*. He moreover menaced the prophet, with an evident reference to Zechariah, whom for a similar offence his father had put to death^a. Thus he authoritatively silenced the messenger of Heaven; and determinately persisted in his impious idolatry.]

No less reasonable than the expostulations made with him, are those which in God's name we make with you from time to time—

[They principally relate to two points; *Your rejection of God as the supreme good; and, your neglect of Christ as the only Mediator between God and man.*

And is there no ground, abundant ground, for remonstrances on these points? Though Jehovah is acknowledged in words as the true God, is he loved, and served, and honoured, *as God*? Do we give him our whole hearts, and “cast all our idols to the moles and to the bats?” Say whether “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life” be not in reality preferred before him, and whether we do not provoke him to jealousy by these, and other “idols which we set up in our hearts?”——And though we confess Christ to be the Saviour of the world, say whether we seek him, and rely upon him, and plead his merits at the throne of grace, and renounce with abhorrence all dependence on our own wisdom, strength, or righteousness? Alas! it is manifest, that the regard paid to him amongst us, is by no means what it ought to be, and that all his love to us is repaid, for the most part, with cold indifference and mere formal acknowledgments ———

We ask then, Whether, as servants of the Most High God, we have not reason to complain, reprove, expostulate? and whether our most earnest representations ought not to be taken in good part?]

Yet is our testimony, like that of the prophet, too often rejected with disdain—

[In public indeed we are permitted to speak with some degree of plainness: yet even there a faithful discharge of our duty is sure to bring upon us no little measure of odium and reproach. If we exhort, reprove, rebuke, with all authority, as we are commanded to do, many, especially of the higher ranks, will consider themselves as insulted; and will either endeavour to silence us, or, if unable to effect that, will withdraw from a minister that is so offensive to them. Their advice

^a 2 Chron. xxiv. 20, 21.

to us is like that of the Jews of old; "Prophecy not unto us right things; prophecy unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits; make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us," or, at least, do not set him before us in his real character^b. And, when they cannot prevail, they tell us plainly, if not in words, yet more strongly in deed, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee^c."

And what if we presume to speak to men in private? What indignation do we then excite! If there we should say to them, "I have a message unto thee from the Lord;" and should then proceed to add, in reference to their contempt of God as their chief good, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not^d?" and then, in reference to their contempt of Christ as their Saviour, "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation^e?" we should soon find whether the spirit of Amaziah does not prevail at this day, as much as ever. It is worthy of observation, that those very persons who will take the most indecent liberties with *us*, decrying to our face all *our* views and conduct as the grossest absurdity, will not suffer us to speak in ever so gentle terms to *them* against *their* views and conduct: and, if we presume to bear a faithful testimony against the iniquities that prevail around us, we are instantly silenced by reproaches, and are cast out as the very pests of society^f."]

That we may be the better able to appreciate such conduct, we now proceed to shew,

II. In what light it is to be viewed—

The world themselves uphold one another in this **conduct**, as innocent at least, if not also highly laudable: but, wheresoever it is found, it must be regarded,

1. As a symptom of obduracy—

[The prophet needed no other evidence than this to convince him, that Amaziah was a hardened sinner before God. We do not say that every neglect of divine warnings argues the *same degree* of obduracy; but, in proportion as such neglect is wilful, deliberate, and persevering, it betrays a spirit of rebellion, and a determined hostility against the God of heaven. And here let us ask ourselves, whether we have not throughout the course of our whole lives set God at defiance, neglecting

^b Isai. xxx. 8—11.

^c Heb. ii. 3.

^e Jer. xlv. 16.

^f See Jer. xxix. 24—27.

^d Isai. lv. 2.

daily what we knew to be right, and practising habitually what we knew to be contrary to the divine commands? Let each of us enter into the secret recesses of his own heart, and say, Whether his own will, rather than God's, have not been the determining principle of all his actions, and whether *self* have not been the rule, the measure, and the end even of those things wherein he has professed to serve his God? — — — Verily, if to "tremble at God's word" be that which characterizes the first beginnings of grace in the soul, the state of those who can live so carelessly in a wilful opposition to it must be awful indeed.]

2. As a ground of dereliction—

[God's secret "determination" to withdraw from Amaziah all further communications of his grace, was justly inferred from the measure of obduracy now visible in his conduct. And though we cannot *certainly* dive into the secrets of the Almighty, we may often form a very probable judgment respecting them from what we see with our eyes. We know how God has acted in former times, and how he has told us that he will act: "My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me," says he; "so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust^s." Repeatedly is the same awful truth declared respecting the heathen world, notwithstanding their sins were far less aggravated than those committed by persons enjoying the light of revelation^h. What then must *we* expect, who dwell under the meridian light of his Gospel? Have not *we* reason to fear that he will say, "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone!" Yes, indeed: "His Spirit will not always strive with man^k;" and if we continue to "rebel and vex his Holy Spirit, he will turn to be our enemy, and fight against us^l." If once we prevail to quench the motions of his Spirit, our state will be awful beyond all expression: "Woe to them," says God, "when I depart from them^m!"]

3. As a prelude to destruction—

[Trace the conduct of Amaziah from this moment, and behold his end! He would not listen to the counsels of God, and he is instantly given over to other counsellorsⁿ. He sends a challenge to the king of Israel, who dissuades him from entering into an unnecessary and destructive war. The parable used on this occasion intimated to him his insufficiency to cope with Israel, and the certain issue of so unequal a contest^o: but "he would not hear; for IT CAME OF GOD, that he might

^s Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12.

^k Gen. vi. 3.

ⁿ ver. 17.

^h Rom. i. 24, 26, 28.

^l Isai. lxiii. 10.

^o ver. 18, 19.

ⁱ Hos. iv. 17.

^m Hos. ix. 12.

deliver them into the hand of their enemies, *because they sought after the gods of Edom*^p." To battle he went, and was defeated, and taken; and his capital became an easy prey to the conqueror, who plundered it of all its wealth, and broke down a portion of the wall which had been erected for its defence^q. From that time he lost all the affection and confidence of his subjects, who at last conspired against him; and, when he "had fled to Lachish for safety, sent after him and slew him there." The whole of this is traced to God as its author, *on account of his impious rejection of the divine counsels*^r.

And what may not be expected by us also, if we "reject the counsel of God against ourselves?" Surely we shall be left to follow the infatuated devices of others, or of our own hearts, till we bring upon ourselves the destruction we have merited. Hear, how awfully this is declared by God himself: "If we receive not the love of the truth that we may be saved, God will send us a strong delusion, that we may believe a lie, and finally be damned, because we believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness^s." And by us is this sentence more especially to be expected, because of the *many* and *faithful* warnings which we have despised; for "he that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy^t." The gathering of clouds does not more certainly portend rain, than a contempt of God's messages gives reason to expect his everlasting displeasure.]

LEARN then,

1. In what manner we should attend the ordinances of religion—

[We should "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, if we would not deceive our own souls" — — —]

2. What obligations we owe to God for his long-suffering towards us—

[Long has "he stood at the door of our hearts, knocking^u," and has been refused admission^v — — — O let us bless his name, that he has not yet given us over to judicial blindness, and final impenitence^w. Still has our Great Advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ, interceded for us^x; and still does our "God wait to be gracious unto us." O that "to-day, while it is called to-day, we might hear the voice" that yet soundeth in our ears, and that "the long-suffering of our God might lead us to repentance^y!"]

^p ver. 20.

^q 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

^r Rev. iii. 20.

^s Acts xxviii. 25—27.

^t ver. 21—24.

^u Prov. xxix. 1.

^v Cant. v. 2, 3.

^w Luke xiii. 6—9.

^x ver. 27.

^y Jam. i. 21—24.

^z Rom. ii. 4.

CCCCXVII.

CONNEXION BETWEEN DILIGENCE AND PROSPERITY.

2 Chron. xxvi. 5. *As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.*

THE dispensation under which the Jews lived being of a temporal nature, their advancement in respect of temporal prosperity was, for the most part, proportioned to the regard which they, and their rulers, shewed to God. The account given of Uzziah may serve almost as a general history of God's conduct towards them*: when he walked humbly before God, "he was marvellously helped till he was strong^b:" but when, by his pride and disobedience, he had provoked God's heavy displeasure, he was given over to "destruction." The dispensation under which we live is altogether spiritual; and God observes the same rule of procedure towards us in spiritual things, as he maintained towards them in temporal things.

Respecting the prosperity of our souls the text calls us to notice two things;

I. Its dependence on God—

[However diligent Uzziah was in seeking the Lord, it was God, and God alone, that "*made him to prosper.*" And whatever means we may use, our advancement in the divine life must be traced to the same source. Our first inclinations to good originate with him. The continuance and increase of holy dispositions is in like manner the effect of his grace. If he were for one moment to suspend his communications, we should be as incapable of bearing fruit to his glory, as a branch is when severed from the tree. Let it only be inquired wherein prosperity of soul consists^c; and it will immediately appear, that he must be the author of it in all its parts — — —]

II. Its connexion with our diligence—

[The fruits of the earth are given us by God; yet he bestows his bounties on those only who use the proper means for the attainment of them. So does he also require exertion on

* Lev. xxvi. 3—45.

ver. 8, 15.

^c A subjugation of our passions; a victory over the world; an abiding sense and enjoyment of the divine presence.

our part in order to our spiritual advancement. The means are inseparably connected with the end: they are connected *in God's decree*^d—*in the very nature of things*—and *in the experience of all the saints*; and the more diligently we use the means, the more will both “grace and peace be multiplied unto us.”]

From this SUBJECT we may derive matter,

1. For reproof—

[How awfully does this reprove *the careless sinner!* for if all our prosperity of soul be inseparably connected with diligence in the ways of God, it is obvious that they who neglect the word of God and prayer must be in a perishing condition. *The backslider* too must feel himself condemned by the fact recorded in the text. It is plainly intimated that Uzziah, through his remissness, experienced a sad reverse. And such a reverse will all experience who relax their diligence in the ways of God. Let us watch therefore against secret declensions: and, if we have already declined, let us “repent, and do our first works^e,” and “strengthen, by exertion, the dying remnants” of grace within us^f.]

2. For encouragement—

[We cannot command success, either in temporal or spiritual pursuits; yet in both it is found true, that “the diligent hand maketh rich.” In some instances indeed God is found of them that sought him not; and persons may use the means of grace without receiving any sensible increase of grace or peace. Nevertheless this is not God's usual mode of proceeding; nor does he ever continue either to bless the indolent, or to withhold his blessing from the diligent. He never will suffer any to seek his face in vain^g. Let this then encourage all to persevere in the use of means, “knowing assuredly that their labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”]

^d Ezek. xxxvi. 37. Matt. vii. 7, 8.

^e Rev. ii. 4, 5.

^f Rev. iii. 2.

^g Isai. xlv. 19.

CCCCXVIII.

THE BAD EFFECTS OF PROSPERITY.

2 Chron. xxvi. 15, 16. *He was marvellously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.*

IT not unfrequently happens, that, after the most promising appearances of abundance, the hopes of

the harvestman are disappointed: some blast, or some destructive insect cuts off the fruits ere they arrive at maturity, so that "the mower fills not his arms with them, neither he that bindeth up the sheaves his bosom." Thus also it is too often found in the moral and religious world: persons begin to "run well, and continue for a season; but are at last hindered," and "come short of that rest" which they had professed to seek. This is particularly found in those whose hopeful conduct has been chiefly occasioned by external influence. We have seen in Joash, that "he did that which was right all the days of Jehoiada the priest;" but after his decease, he turned aside to wickedness, and brought the heavy judgments of God both on himself and all his people^a. Thus it was also with his grandson, Uzziah. For many years "he sought after God^b;" and was very signally blessed, and prospered of the Lord during all that time: yet, through the influence of that very prosperity, he fell, and perished miserably under the hand of an avenging God.

The words of our text will naturally lead us to set before you,

I. The proper tendency of prosperity—

Doubtless, prosperity cheers the mind; but its proper tendency is,

1. To puff up with pride—

[It is difficult to succeed in any enterprise, or any labour, without arrogating to ourselves a considerable portion of credit on account of it: "We sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense to our own drag^c" — — — That this is the common influence of prosperity, appears from the cautions given to the Israelites respecting it, in an instance where it should seem to be impossible for them to do otherwise than give the whole honour to God^d. But pride, though so unsuitable to a fallen creature, is, alas! too powerful a principle in every child of man. Behold Nebuchadnezzar in the summit of his glory^e — — — or Uzziah, when he had been "marvellously helped, till he was strong:" how forgetful were they of the obligations

^a 2 Chron. xxiv. 2, 17, 18.

^b ver. 5.

^c Hab. i. 16.

^d Deut. viii. 11—14.

^e Dan. iv. 30—32. and v. 20.

which they owed to God! Even the pious Hezekiah fell, through the influence of pride, though afterwards he humbled himself for this transgression. Indeed it is very rare that persons elevated by the acquisition of wealth or honour retain their former simplicity: they rise in their own esteem, in proportion as they are looked up to by others, and account the homage that is paid to them a tribute due to their superior worth.]

2. To harden in iniquity—

[It is not towards men only that prosperity affects our conduct, but even towards God himself. We can scarcely attain any considerable advancement in the world, but presently we become “presumptuous, and self-willed:” we allow ourselves a greater latitude to follow the inclinations of our own hearts: and, if checked by any faithful monitor, we will not endure his expostulations or reproofs; but, like Uzziah, are “wroth with him” for performing his duty, instead of being grieved at ourselves for transgressing our own. We think ourselves at liberty to act as we please; and that neither God nor man has any right to call us to account. This is most justly depicted by the Psalmist^f — — — and is traced by him to prosperity, as its proper source^g — — — Ah! how many such instances have we seen, of men once apparently modest and humble, but afterwards, like “Jeshurun, waxing fat and kicking, and forsaking the God that made them, and lightly esteeming the rock of their salvation^h!” We are apt to envy such persons, when we behold their prosperity: but we shall see little reason to do so, if we duly consider the effects produced by it on their mindsⁱ.]

Rarely indeed has any spiritual good arisen from prosperity: but how awful is it to reflect on,

II. Its frequent termination—

Behold how it terminated in the case before us!

[Uzziah, not content with the pomp of royalty, would usurp also the priestly office: and, when reprov'd for his presumption, was filled with indignation against his reprovers. But “*whilst he was wroth with the priests*, the leprosy rose up in his forehead^k:” and immediately “they thrust him out of the temple; yea, himself also hasted to go out, because the Lord had smitten him^l.” Thus it is with many who “once made a fair shew in the flesh;” “being lifted up with pride, they fall into the condemnation of the devil^m.” From their scenes of earthly happiness

^f Ps. x. 4—6, 11, 13.

^g Ps. lxxiii. 3—9, 11, 12.

^h Deut. xxxii. 15.

ⁱ Ps. lxxiii. 3, 16—19.

^k ver. 19. ^l ver. 20.

^m 1 Tim. iii. 6.

they are cast headlong into the lowest abyss of misery, like the rich man in the parable, whose surviving brethren, misled by his example, were following him thither with hasty strides^a. But, if we could conceive by any means that such an one had found his way into heaven, the very transaction that took place in the temple would be renewed there; the inhabitants of those blessed mansions, indignant at his presumption, would instantly "*thrust him out*"; yea, "he himself would haste to go out," not being able to endure the countenance of his offended God^b. Let it not be thought that this is an uncommon termination of prosperity: for both Scripture and observation teach us to regard it as its frequent and ordinary result^c.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. To be moderate in our desire after earthly things—

[We may desire prosperity, because it is a gift of God to men^d; and is particularly promised to those who love him^e. But we should desire it only in submission to the will of God. We know not what will be its ultimate effect upon our souls. We know not what advantage it will give to our corrupt nature to break forth, and to plunge us into everlasting misery. Let us be diligent in our earthly calling, whatever it may be; but, as to any anxious concern about it, "let our moderation be known unto all men^f." "Our affections must not be set on things below, but on those which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God."]

2. To be patient and resigned under any trials that may come upon us—

[Trials are "not at the present joyous, but grievous;" but they are promised by God as the choicest fruit of his paternal love^g. Even Paul himself needed a thorn in his flesh, "lest he should be exalted above measure^h." Who then are we, that we should think trials unnecessary for us? They are the furnace, that is to purify us from our drossⁱ, or the pruning-knife, that is to render us more fruitful in good works^j. We know how profitable it was to Manasseh to be taken among the thorns^k; and we have reason to hope that our afflictions also shall be sanctified to our good^l, and that we shall at the close

^a Luke xvi. 22, 23, 27, 28.

^e Luke xiii. 28.

^b Isai. xxxiii. 14. Compare the three verses following; which shew that the godly alone can dwell with God.

^c Prov. i. 32. with Matt. xix. 23—26.

^f ver. 5.

^d Ps. i. 3. and cxxii. 6.

^g Phil. iv. 5.

^e Heb. xii. 6—8. ^h 2 Cor. xii. 7.

ⁱ Isai. xxvii. 9.

^f John xv. 2.

^j 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 12.

^k Heb. xii. 10.

of them adopt the language of David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted^c."

3. To be thankful for the high honour conferred upon us—

[To none of the Jewish kings was given the united honour of royalty and priesthood: that was reserved for Christ alone, who was to be "a Priest upon his throne^d:" who yet, though a king, "glorified not himself to be made a High-priest, but was called to it of God, as was Aaron^e." But that honour has our adorable Saviour procured for us: "He has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto our God for ever and ever^f." Yes, we are "a royal priesthood^g;" and "by the new and living way which he has opened for us through the veil, we may draw nigh" even to the very throne of God himself^h: and our doing so in faith will rid us from the leprosy, instead of bringing the leprosy upon us; and, instead of arming the angels against us, will make them to rejoiceⁱ. Let us then improve our liberty, and "offer up spiritual sacrifices to our God from day to day, assured, that they are acceptable to him through Jesus Christ^k."

^c Ps. cxix. 71.

^d Zech. vi. 13.

^e Heb. v. 4, 5.

^f Rev. i. 5, 6.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^h Heb. x. 19—22.

ⁱ Luke xv. 10. and xvi. 22.

^k 1 Pet. ii. 5.

CCCCXIX.

A SENSE OF SINFULNESS A GOOD CORRECTIVE OF EVIL PASSIONS.

2 Chron. xxviii. 10. *Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?*

IN viewing the various dispensations of Providence, we should regard the Supreme Disposer of all events not merely as a mighty Sovereign ordering every thing according to his own will, but rather as a moral Governor, who has respect to the welfare of his creatures, and consults the best interests of the universe. Towards individuals indeed his dealings may not accord with our ideas of retributive justice, because there is another world wherein the seeming inequalities of his present conduct towards them will all be rectified: but towards nations, as this is the only time when they can be dealt with in their

national capacity, he conducts himself more visibly according to their moral habits, rewarding them when they walk agreeably to his will, and punishing them when their violations of his commands are general and flagrant. We must not however imagine, that the persons whom he makes use of as instruments of his displeasure, are more righteous than those whom he sends them to correct; for he may, and does, use what instruments he pleases: but the persons corrected, will always be found to have brought upon themselves his judgments by their own wilful and obstinate impiety. This is a truth so obvious and incontrovertible, that even idolaters themselves receive it with the greatest facility, and are sometimes influenced by it to a great extent. The Israelites, at the time that the Prophet Oded was sent to them, were sunk in the grossest idolatry; yet, when informed by him that their victory over Judah was the result of a divine appointment on account of Judah's sins, and that the excessive cruelty with which that victory had been accompanied would bring the divine displeasure upon them also, they instantly sacrificed both their interests and their resentments, and yielded obedience to the prophet's admonitions. The expostulation in our text came home with power to their consciences; "Are there not with you, even with you, sins against the Lord your God?" May we also feel its force, whilst we,

I. Urge you to institute the proposed inquiry—

The circumstances under which this inquiry was proposed naturally lead us to consider it,

1. In reference to the nation at large—

[Doubtless there are great enormities in other lands: the grossest superstitions and the most flagrant impieties testify against the great majority of those who bear the Christian name. But whilst we of this land boast of our superior light and morals, what abominations are found amongst us! Let us not think that because the evils once perpetrated in the slave-trade have been in a measure suppressed, the blood of thousands and tens of thousands does not yet cry to God against us for our insatiable avarice, and our cruel injustice. For

centuries yet to come, we need bewail the guilt that has been contracted by our impious traffic in human blood. Besides, the light with which we have been favoured beyond other nations, only renders our misimprovement of it the more criminal: for though certainly there are many in the land who highly value and adorn the Gospel, there is with the generality a neglect and contempt of serious religion; so that real piety is branded with infamy amongst us, more than infidelity or ungodliness itself. Truly, on a view of all ranks and orders amongst us, we have as much reason to be ashamed and confounded before God, as any who may have experienced his heaviest judgments.]

2. In reference to ourselves in particular—

[We are all ready enough to mark what is amiss in others, and even to ascribe the calamities of others to the intervention of an offended Providence. But it would be well for all to search out and examine their own faults, rather than to be uncharitably condemning the faults of others. The self-righteous, self-applauding moralist can spy out the failings and infirmities of those who profess a stricter system of religion; but let me ask such an one, are there not in thee, even in thee, sins against the Lord thy God? Hast thou not a beam in thine own eye, whilst thou art noticing with such severity the mote in thy brother's eye? Look and see whether thy religion of which thou thinkest so highly be not a mere form of godliness without the power of it? See whether the Bible be dearer to thee than gold and silver, and be relished by thee more than thy necessary food? See whether thy heart be broken and contrite before God, so that thou often weepest before God on account of the sins thou hast committed against him? See whether Christ be precious in thy sight, so that all thy hope, all thy desire, all thy delight are centered in him alone? In a word, see whether all thy faculties and powers are consecrated to the service of Him who lived and died for thee? Verily, if thou wouldest consult the records of thy conscience in relation to these things, thou wouldest see little reason, and feel little inclination too, to cast stones at others.

On the other hand, professors of religion also are but too often guilty of this same fault, being filled with an overweening conceit of their own excellencies, and a contemptuous disregard of their less spiritual neighbours. But I would ask the professed follower of Christ, are there not sins with thee too, as well as with the Pharisaic formalist? Are there not great and crying evils in the religious world, which prove a stumbling-block to those around them? Are not a vain conceit, an obtrusive talkativeness, an inattention to relative duties, and a disregard of just authority, often indulged under the cloak

of religion? Are there not often found amongst professors of religion the same covetous desires, the same fraudulent practices, the same deviations from truth and honour, as are found in persons who make no profession? Are there not many whose tempers are so unsubdued, that they make their whole families a scene of contention and misery? Yes; though the accusations which are brought against the whole body of religious people as hypocrites are a gross calumny, there is but too much ground for them in the conduct of many.

But where these observations do not at all apply, we must still renew the question, even to the most exemplary amongst us, "Are there not sins with thee also," even such as would justify God in taking vengeance upon thee? Think of thy manifold short comings and defects; yea, think of "the iniquity even of thy holiest things;" and, instead of exalting thyself above others, thou wilt call thyself "less than the least of all saints," or rather "the chief of sinners."]

But, that the inquiry may be suitably improved, we will,

II. Point out the ends for which it should be made—

There is not any part of Christian experience which would not be deeply affected by the knowledge of our own hearts: but, as our observations on this subject must of necessity be few, we shall confine ourselves to those which arise from the passage under our consideration.

We should inquire then into our own sins,

1. To make us estimate aright the distinguished mercies vouchsafed unto us—

[Let us reflect on the peaceful state of this nation during the whole period in which we have been engaged in war, whilst every nation in Europe has in its turn sustained the heaviest calamities*; and how shall we adore that Providence that has protected us!]

Let us contemplate also the numbers who have from time to time been cut off in their sins, though they had neither attained to our age, nor committed our iniquities: O what reason have we to adore the mercy that has spared us, and that still waits to be gracious to us! May we not well be astonished, that whilst so many have been taken, we are left; and that whilst they are gone beyond redemption, we are yet on

* March 1814, when the North of Germany was so desolated and distressed.

praying ground? If we know little of ourselves, we shall feel but little gratitude for this mercy: but, if we are duly sensible of our own extreme vileness, we shall be overwhelmed with a view of his goodness to us, and shall sink, as it were, under a sense of our unbounded obligations.]

2. To moderate our resentments to our offending brethren—

[The former idea was *implied* in the prophet's address to Israel; but this was plainly *expressed*. The cruelty exercised by them was extreme: and, to deter them from prosecuting their inhuman projects, was this suggestion made: for how could they proceed with such rigour towards others, when they who deserved so much heavier judgments had experienced such lenity from the hands of God?

Certain it is, that we feel keenly for the most part the injuries that are done to us; and that we are but too apt to indulge a vindictive spirit. But the evils that a fellow-creature can do to us are nothing in comparison of those which we ourselves have committed against God: how then can we proceed with severity against a fellow-servant for a few pence, when a debt of ten thousand talents has been remitted unto us? Surely we shall be afraid lest God should mete to us the measure which we have dealt out to others, and that, we "having shewn no mercy to others, should have judgment without mercy ourselves^b."

3. To stir us up to imitate the compassion of our God—

[What a marvellous exercise of compassion was that which arose from the prophet's admonition! The princes of the congregation were led to protest against the measures now about to be adopted by the victorious army; and that army, with the spoils and captives in their hands, renounced immediately all their views of interest and resentment, and made use of the very spoils, whereby they had expected to be enriched, to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and comfort the distressed, and honour those whom they had so deeply degraded^c: they even put on asses the sick and feeble; and themselves took them back to the borders of their own country. This was what they now saw to have been the conduct of God towards them, and they desired to tread in his steps.

And what has God done for us? Even when we were enemies, he gave his only dear Son to die for us: yea, and notwithstanding all our continued impieties, he stretches out his hands to us all the day long, and importunes us to accept his

^b Jam. ii. 13.

^c "Anointing them."

proffered salvation. Thus, if we know how contrary to our deserts these mercies are, we shall be ready to act towards our brethren: instead of rendering evil for evil, we shall “feed our enemy, or give him drink,” in hopes of melting him into love by heaping kindness upon him, just as the workman fuses his metals by an accumulation of fire upon them^d: he will not “be overcome of evil, but will overcome evil with good^e.”]

Let this subject TEACH us,

1. To cultivate the knowledge of our own hearts—

[It is that, and that alone, which will bring us to act aright in any part of our duty. Without a sense of sin we can never be humbled before God; and without humility we can never exercise a just measure of forbearance and of kindness to man. Then only, when we are sensible of having “been forgiven much, shall we love much.”]

2. To keep our minds open to conviction—

[It is surprising how soon this whole multitude was convinced of sin. Let us learn from them not to dispute with our reprovers, or to vindicate ourselves at the expense of truth: let us rather desire to find out our errors, that they may be rectified, than to cloke them, and hold them fast.]

3. To follow instantly the convictions of our own minds—

[The Israelites fulfilled to the uttermost what they apprehended to be the mind and will of God: they did not plead for their interest, on the one hand, nor were they deterred by a fear of shame, on the other: they saw their duty, and performed it instantly without reserve. O that our reproofs might thus meet always an obedient ear! This ready obedience was their highest honour: let us regard it as ours also: and let us beware, lest this host of benevolent idolaters rise up in judgment against us, to our utter confusion, and our eternal condemnation.]

^d Rom. xii. 14, 17, 19, 20. There is in this last verse an astonishing beauty in the word *ψώμιζε*, which imports the feeding him as a helpless infant; and corresponds exactly with the tender and respectful care exercised by the Israelites on this occasion. ver. 15.

^e Rom. xii. 21.

CCCCXX.

THE CONDUCT OF AHAZ IN HIS DISTRESS.

2 Chron. xxviii. 22. *In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz.*

IT is a common sentiment with men in health, that they will repent and turn to God in a time of sickness: they imagine that trouble will of course dispose their minds for the exercises of religion, and that they may therefore safely postpone all serious attention to their eternal interests, till that hour shall arrive. But there is no necessary connexion between affliction and true piety: "the sorrow of the world worketh death;" and consequently must rather be adverse to, than productive of, "godly sorrow, which alone worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of^a." If indeed trouble be accompanied with the grace of God, it then operates like the ploughing up of fallow ground for the reception of the seed: but of itself it only hardens the heart against God, and calls forth into activity the most malignant passions of the soul. This cannot be more strikingly illustrated than in the conduct of Ahaz; in speaking of which we shall notice,

I. The evil imputed to him—

This was doubtless exceeding great. Ahaz having provoked God by his great and multiplied iniquities, was given up by God into the hands of the Edomites first, and then of the Philistines, as the just punishment of his sins. The Assyrians too, whom he had hired as his allies, eventually, "instead of strengthening him, helped forward his distress^b."

And what was the effect of these troubles on his mind? Did he humble himself before his God, and implore mercy at his hands? No; but renounced his God altogether, setting up the gods of Syria in opposition to him, and shutting up the doors of his temple, and destroying the vessels that had been consecrated to his service, and building altars in

^a 2 Cor. vii. 10.^b ver. 16—20.

every corner of Jerusalem, and, in every city of Judah, making high places, to burn incense unto other gods^c.

We must confess that such impiety far exceeds what is commonly found in the world at this day; but in lower degrees it is found to obtain amongst us also. All of us have a measure of trouble inflicted on us by God on account of sin; and in a variety of ways have we misimproved the divine chastisements. The very evil imputed to Ahaz of trespassing yet more in his distress, may be committed by us in our troubles,

1. By indifference—

[Nothing is more common than to overlook the hand of God in our trials, ascribing them either to chance, or to second causes only, and regarding them as merely the usual events of life. In such a state of mind we meet them with a kind of stoical apathy, making the best of existing circumstances, and trying, by the expedients of pleasure, business, company, or occupation of some kind, to divert our thoughts, and alleviate our pains^d. This is, as the Scripture expresses it, to “*despise* the chastening of the Lord^e.” And how offensive must such conduct be! When HE speaks, and we will not hear^f; when HIS hand is lifted up, and we will not see it^g; what is this but, in effect, to say, “The Lord doth neither good nor evil^h!” This indifference is well described by the prophet, in relation to Israel of old: “It (God’s anger) hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew it not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heartⁱ.” But, however such conduct may be countenanced by an ungodly world, it will surely be visited with God’s heavy displeasure^k.]

2. By obstinacy—

[Some, whilst they are not altogether unconscious from whence their afflictions proceed, are yet determined to go on in their own way: “they refuse to receive correction, and make their faces harder than a rock, and refuse to return to God^l.” Thus it was with the Jews of old; “The people turneth not unto him that smiteth him; neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts^m. And on this ground it was that the prophet uttered

^c ver. 23—25.

^f Job xxxiii. 14.

ⁱ Isai. xlii. 25.

^l Jer. v. 3. Isai. lvii. 17.

^d Isai. xxii. 12, 13.

^g Isai. xxvi. 11.

^k Ps. xxviii. 5.

^e Prov. iii. 11.

^h Zeph. i. 12.

^m Isai. ix. 13.

that heavy complaint against them; "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil-doers! Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more^a." Happy would it be if this rebellious spirit had been confined to them: but it is no less prevalent amongst us: there are many for whose reformation successive strokes have proved ineffectual; and who are yet as far from God as if no such means had ever been used to bring them to repentance: yea, like Pharaoh, they seem only to have been hardened by the plagues inflicted on them. The Lord grant that they may see their error, ere they be given over to judicial blindness and final impenitence!]

3. By murmuring—

[How often do we hear people complaining of their lot, as if their sufferings were intolerable and undeserved! However clearly God marks their sin in their punishment, they reflect not on themselves as the sinful causes of their misery, but on him as the severe and unprovoked author of them^b. Thus Isaiah, foretelling the effect of God's chastisements on the Jews, says, "They shall pass through the land hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that, when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their God and their king^c." And what shall we say of such a disposition? what shall we say of him who by "his own foolishness perverteth his way, and then in heart fretteth against the Lord^d?" This we must say, that he manifests the very dispositions of hell itself: for of the unhappy spirits that are there confined, we are told, that "they gnaw their tongues for pain, and blaspheme the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and they repent not of their deeds^e."]]

4. By despondency—

[As on the one hand we are apt to "*despise* the chastening of the Lord," so, on the other hand, we are ready to "*faint* when we are rebuked of him^f." We have no idea of chastisements proceeding from love; and, beholding nothing but wrath in them, we conclude, that it is in vain to call upon God, and that he will never be entreated of us. Thus even from despondency we derive arguments for continuance in sin: "There is no hope: no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go^g." Of this God himself complains^h; and well he may, since it is a limiting of his power, as though he were not able to deliverⁱ; or a denial of his mercy, as though he had

^a Isai. i. 4, 5. ^b Exod. xvi. 35, 41. Ezek. xviii. 25, 29.

^c Isai. viii. 21. ^d Prov. xix. 3. ^e Rev. xvi. 9—11.

^f Heb. xii. 5. ^g Jer. ii. 25. ^h Jer. xviii. 12, 13.

ⁱ Isai. l. 2.

“forgotten to be gracious, and his mercy were clean gone for ever.” True it is, that despondency is often indulged under an idea that it is an expression of humility: but it is as offensive to God as any of the dispositions before specified, and tends, even more strongly than any of them, to bind our sins upon us.]

That we may be the more afraid of following the steps of Ahaz, let us consider,

II. The stigma fixed upon him—

There is an extraordinary force and emphasis in the expression, “This is that king Ahaz”—

[It is as though God intended to point him out to the whole world as a prodigy of folly and wickedness: this is that *infatuated* man, who presumes to “strive with his Maker, like the clay quarrelling with the potter^a,” or “briers and thorns setting themselves in battle array against the devouring fire^a.” This is that *ungrateful* man, who, when I have been chastening him with parental tenderness in order to prevent the necessity of executing my everlasting judgments upon him, has only multiplied his transgressions against me; breaking through every hedge which I made to restrain him, and throwing down every wall which I erected to impede his course^b. This is that *impious* man, who, in the madness of his heart, has determined to banish me from the world, and to blot out the remembrance of me from the earth.]

As the expression is emphatical with respect to him, so it is most instructive with respect to us—

[It clearly shews us that “*sin is a reproach to any people*.” We may vindicate it, and applaud it; but we only “glory in our shame^d,” for it makes a man as loathsome “as a sepulchre that is full of all uncleanness^e.” Sin is fitly characterized as “filthiness of the flesh and spirit^f,” and in that light it is viewed, not by God only, but by all who are taught of God. Examine the fore-mentioned sins, of indifference, of obstinacy, of murmuring, and despondency, and they will all be found odious in the extreme; so that a man under the dominion of them may well be pointed out as an object of universal abhorrence: “This is that king Ahaz^g.” It is possible indeed that an ungodly man may pass through life without any such stigma fixed upon him: but he will not escape it in the last day, when all the most secret sins shall be revealed: then will that declaration of Solomon be fully verified, “The wicked man

^a Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^b Isai. xlv. 9.

^c Isai. xxvii. 4.

^d Hos. ii. 6.

^e Prov. xiv. 34.

^f Phil. iii. 19.

^g Matt. xxiii. 27.

^h 2 Cor. vii. 1.

ⁱ Ps. lii. 7.

is loathsome, and cometh to shame^b:" however cautiously he may have veiled his wickedness from the eyes of men, or even obtained the applause of man for his pretended virtues, he will "awake to shame and everlasting contempt¹."

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. The great design of God in our troubles—

[God does not willingly afflict the children of men. He is a tender Parent, who seeks the welfare of his children, and "chastens them for their profit," to humble them, and to prove them, and to make them "partakers of his holiness^k." Hence it is said, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord¹." Let us then contemplate our trials in this view. From whatever quarter they may come, let us acknowledge the hand of God in them; and bless his name, as well when he takes away, as when he gives^m.]

2. Our duty under them—

[Every rod has a voice to us, which we should endeavour to understandⁿ: and, if we cannot immediately discern its true import, we should go to God, and say, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me^o." And, when we have found out "the accursed thing that troubleth our camp^p," then we should "humble ourselves under the mighty hand of our God^q," and with meek submission say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him^r." We should even be thankful for the fire that purgeth away our dross, and not so much as wish to be delivered from it till we can come out of it purified as gold.]

^b Prov. xiii. 5.

¹ Dan. xii. 2.

^k Isai. xxvii. 9. Heb. xii. 10.

¹ Ps. xciv. 10.

^m Job i. 21.

ⁿ Mic. vi. 9.

^o Job x. 2.

^p Josh. vii. 11.

^q Jam. iv. 10.

^r Mic. vii. 9.

CCCCXXI.

THE USE OF COVENANTING WITH GOD.

2 Chron. xxix. 10, 11. *Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us. My sons, be not now negligent.*

A TRULY pious man will not be satisfied with serving God in his closet. He will exert his influence to bring others also to a sense of their duty. The public exercise of the ministry indeed belongs to

those only who are duly called to it^a: but all who are possessed of authority (parents, masters, magistrates and kings) should use it for the promoting of virtue and religion. Christians of every rank and description should exhort one another^b. We have a noble example set before us in the conduct of Hezekiah. As soon as he came to the throne, he set himself to restore the service of the temple, and called upon all, both ministers and people, to make a solemn covenant with their God.

The royal proclamation for the observance of this day^c, speaks, in effect, the language of the text. From which I will take occasion to shew,

I. When we have reason to apprehend that God's anger is waxed hot against us—

We cannot in all cases determine how far a dispensation may be sent in anger or in love: but in general we may say, that God is incensed against us,

1. When our sins are multiplied against him—

[Sin is invariably the object of God's abhorrence^d. This truth is so evident that it needs not any confirmation. For, what lamentable depravity pervades every part of the nation! There is no iniquity, however heinous, which is not practised without remorse. If we look into our own bosoms, what reason for humiliation may we find! What ingratitude for mercies received, and what impenitence for sins committed! What rebellion against God, what contempt of his Son, what resistance of his Spirit, have we not occasion to deplore! And shall not God be avenged of such a nation as this? Yes, there is not one amongst us that does not deserve to be made a monument of his wrath.]

2. When his judgments are multiplied upon us—

[God often sends *temporal* afflictions to his people in love^e. But *spiritual* judgments are a certain token of his wrath. Blindness of mind, obduracy of heart, and obstinacy in sin, are among his heaviest judgments^f. And have none of us reason to fear that these are now inflicted on us? But it is by temporal judgments chiefly that he punishes nations. It was from these that Hezekiah judged of God's anger against the Jews^g.

^a Heb. v. 4.

^b Heb. iii. 13.

^c *Fast-day*, March 1798.

^d Hab. i. 13. Ps. v. 5.

^e Heb. xii. 6.

^f Isai. vi. 9, 10.

^g ver. 8, 9.

And are not these multiplied upon our land at this time? Surely the displeasure of God can scarcely ever be more strongly displayed, than it is in the calamities under which we now groan^h.]

But that none may yield to desponding fears we shall point out,

II. How it is to be averted—

Repentance towards God and faith in Christ are the means prescribed by God. But it is not a slight and superficial use of these means that will suffice; we should solemnly devote ourselves to God in a perpetual covenant—

[Not that we should attempt to renew the covenant of works. *That* would make void the Gospel, and seal our eternal condemnation¹. Nor should we think to add any thing to the covenant of grace. That was once made with Christ, and is ordered in all things and sure^k. But we should patiently and deliberately renounce all our former ways. We should seriously give up ourselves to God as his redeemed people; and entreat him to perfect us in any way which he shall see fit.]

Such covenants as these have often been made by the most eminent saints—

[Under the Old-Testament dispensation they were judged acceptable to God. Omitting many other instances, we may notice the solemn covenant of Asa^l. We may notice also that which was entered into by Josiah^m. Isaiah and Jeremiah speak of the making of such covenants as characteristic of the gospel timesⁿ. St. Paul highly commends the conduct of the Macedonians on account of their having thus given themselves up to God^o; and recommends a similar practice to all Christians of every age and nation^p.]

Nor can we doubt of their acceptableness to God—

[Hezekiah manifestly supposed that God would accept him in this duty^q. It was recommended to Ezra in circumstances where there was but little hope remaining^r. And God himself expressly enjoined it as the means of averting his displeasure^s: not that we are to suppose that there is any thing

^h Of course, these strong expressions must be modified according to circumstances.

¹ Gal. iii. 10.

^k Heb. viii. 6.

^l 2 Chron. xv. 12—15.

^m 2 Kings xxiii. 3.

ⁿ Isai. xliv. 5.

Jer. l. 4, 5.

^o 2 Cor. viii. 5.

^p Rom. xii. 1.

^q *The text.*

^r Ezra x. 3.

^s Jer. iv. 4.

meritorious in such an act; but it tends, of itself, to the humiliation and confirmation of our souls, and will be both accepted and remembered by our covenant God and Father[†].]

These means being at once so scriptural and so important, let me now in CONCLUSION urge upon you the adoption of them—

We admire the tender and affectionate address of Hezekiah to the priests. And with similar concern would we now invite you to the performance of your duty. “Let this *now be in all your hearts*.” for,

1. There is no time for delay—

[Many are “negligent” at present in expectation of a more convenient season; but who can assure himself that he shall be alive on the morrow[‡]? or that, if he be, he shall have an inclination to that from which he is now averse? or that God will grant him the aids of his Spirit, which are now contemned? The voice of God to every one is, Seek me to-day, while it is called to-day[‡]. With respect to the nation, who can tell how soon the cloud that hangs over us may burst, and overwhelm us utterly? Let us follow the example of the repenting Ninevites[‡]. If “it be in our hearts to make a covenant,” let it instantly be done[‡]. Let me address all of you as a father, and entreat all of you as “my sons” and daughters to “neglect your duty no longer;” but “*now*” while we are yet speaking, to surrender up yourselves to God with full purpose of heart.]

2. If we neglect this duty, we *cannot hope* to escape the wrath of God—

[Sodom was destroyed, because they laughed at God’s threatenings as idle tales: and the strongest empires, in succession, have fallen a sacrifice to their sins. Who then shall protect *us*, if we continue to provoke the Majesty of heaven? But, whatever be the fate of the nation, we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ: and there none will be acknowledged as his people, who have not voluntarily taken him for their Lord and Saviour. If then ye have any regard for your eternal welfare, neglect him no longer; but, in the penitent language of the prophet, devote yourselves to his service[‡].]

3. If we heartily engage in this duty, we have *nothing to fear*—

[Were such a covenant general through the nation, God

[†] Deut. xxix. 12, 13.

[‡] Jam. iv. 14.

[‡] Heb. iii. 13, 15.

[‡] Jonah iii. 5—9.

[‡] Ps. cxix. 60.

[‡] Isai. xxvi. 13.

would soon remove his judgments. But whatever come upon the land, God's faithful people shall be objects of his favour. Though they may be involved in the general calamities, they shall be comforted with the divine presence^b. They need not therefore be agitated with fear on account of God's displeasure in this world; nor have they any thing to dread in the eternal world^c. Let us then enter into this matter with our whole hearts, and pray day and night for grace to perform our vows. Unfaithfulness to our engagements will incense God still more against us, and provoke him to inflict yet heavier judgments upon us^d. It were even better never to have vowed, than to vow and not pay^e. He however, who puts it into our heart to make, can enable us to keep, our covenant^f. Let us then engage simply in dependence on the divine strength; but found all our hopes of acceptance on that better and unchangeable covenant, which Christ has entered into on our behalf.]

^b Ps. xxxiv. 18, 19. ^c Mal. iii. 17. ^d Jer. xxxiv. 18—20.
^e Eccl. v. 5. 2 Pet. ii. 21. ^f Jude, ver. 24.

CCCCXXII.

RESTORATION OF THE TEMPLE WORSHIP BY HEZEKIAH.

2 Chron. xxix. 20—29. *Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord. And they brought seven bullocks, and seven rams, and seven lambs, and seven he-goats, for a sin-offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah. And he commanded the priests the sons of Aaron to offer them on the altar of the Lord. So they killed the bullocks, and the priests received the blood, and sprinkled it on the altar: likewise, when they had killed the rams, they sprinkled the blood upon the altar; they killed also the lambs, and they sprinkled the blood upon the altar. And they brought forth the he-goats for the sin-offering before the king and the congregation; and they laid their hands upon them: and the priests killed them, and they made reconciliation with their blood upon the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel: for the king commanded that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for all Israel. And he set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets. And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the*

burnt-offering upon the altar. And when the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt-offering was finished. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped.

AMONGST the most eminent of the kings of Judah was Hezekiah. Of several indeed is it said, that they did that which was right in the sight of the Lord; but it was a high commendation of Hezekiah, that he did so “according to all that David his father had done.” He came to the throne under the greatest disadvantages. His father had exceeded in wickedness all the kings that had been before him; and had caused all public acknowledgment of Jehovah to cease from the land. Under such circumstances it might have been supposed that Hezekiah, at the age of twenty-five, would have been infected with the prevailing impieties of his father’s court, or, at all events, that he would not have dared to stem the torrent of iniquity that had borne down all before it: but no sooner was he placed upon his father’s throne, than, even in the first year, and the very first month of his reign, he ordered the temple to be opened, and all the defilements that were in it to be removed, and the worship of the Most High God to be restored. Though there was not that alacrity amongst the priests that might have been expected, the work was soon executed, and in sixteen days the temple, with all its vessels, was prepared and sanctified for the service of God. The very next day, Hezekiah, having his heart set upon the blessed work, “rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord.” The service which they performed on this occasion is related in the words which we have read: and it will serve as an excellent pattern for us on this occasion^a.

^a On the re-opening of a Church after it had been shut up for repair, in 1802.

There are three things in particular to which we would call your attention :

I. Their numerous sacrifices—

[For the sin of a priest or of the whole congregation one bullock only was prescribed to be offered by the law^b: but the impieties of the nation having exceeded all bounds, and been of long continuance, Hezekiah judged that seven bullocks, and an equal number of rams, and lambs, and he-goats, should be sacrificed as a sin-offering to the Lord: and of all of them in succession it is particularly recorded, that "*their blood was sprinkled on the altar.*" When the he-goats were offered, it is further noticed, that "the king and the congregation (by their representatives) *laid their hands upon them.*" Such was the way in which "an atonement was offered, and reconciliation made for all Israel."

And who does not here see the gospel method of reconciliation with God through the great Sacrifice which was once offered on Mount Calvary? This it was which the sacrifices under the Law shadowed forth; and this it is which opens a way for our restoration to the divine favour. "We are reconciled to God through the blood of the cross." By this one offering there is a new and living way consecrated for us through the veil; and by it sinners of every description may draw nigh to God with full assurance of faith.

But here let me particularly call your attention to those two points, *the sprinkling the blood upon the altar*, and *the laying of their hands upon the victims*. Never must we draw nigh to God on any occasion without adverting to these significant emblems, or rather without realizing that which was here figuratively proclaimed. *We must sprinkle the altar of our God with the Redeemer's blood:* we must actually bear in mind, and expressly declare before God, that all our hope of acceptance with him is through the atoning blood of Christ. That sentiment must be so fixed in the mind, and rooted in the heart, as never to be lost sight of for one moment. *The repetition in our text* shews us what must be continually repeated by us in every approach of our souls to God. As "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," so without an express affiance in that blood as the only ground of our hopes there can be no application of that remission to our souls — — — O that this might be duly borne in mind by every one of us! But *we must* also with deep penitential sorrow *transfer our sins to the sacred head of Jesus*. "On him were the iniquities of all laid by God himself;" and *we* also must lay our iniquities upon him in the exercise of humble faith. It is

^b Lev. iv. 3, 14.

by the mutual transfer, if I may so speak, of our sins to him, and of his righteousness to us, that we are to be freed from all our guilt, and to be made righteous in the sight of a holy God: "He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we (who had nothing but sin) might be made the righteousness of God in him" — — — When Christ is thus kept in view in all our transactions with God, we need not fear but that God will be gracious unto us, and seal upon our souls a sense of his forgiving love.]

Let us next notice,

II. Their joyful praises—

[Together with their humiliation, they offered unto God their praises and thanksgivings agreeably to the laws which had been prescribed by God himself. In this also are they worthy of our constant imitation: "In every thing by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God^d," says the Apostle: and what God has so joined we ought not to put asunder.

But here also there are two things worthy of more particular notice: "*When the burnt-offering began, then the song of the Lord also began:*" and "*all this continued until the burnt-offering was finished.*" There was no need to wait: their hearts might well be tuned to praise the very moment they looked to their burnt-offerings as the means of reconciliation with God: nor, as long as they continued so to do, was there the smallest occasion for relaxing in the expressions of their joy. So the very moment we look to the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, and plead with God the merit of his blood, we may begin to rejoice in God as our reconciled God and Father. It is said, "All that believe are justified from all things;" not all that are *strong* in faith, or, all that have exercised faith for such a *length of time*; but *all who believe* (provided their faith be unfeigned) are from that very moment *justified* from all things, and may instantly "rejoice in hope of the glory of God^e." St. John, speaking not to fathers only, or to young men, but to the weakest babes in Christ, says, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake^f." There are many who think it a mark of humility to put away from them all joy, till, as they imagine, the progress of their sanctification shall justify the entrance of it into their souls. But this is altogether founded on ignorance and error. A sinner is not to look into *himself* for his warrant to rejoice in God: the mercy, the love, the truth, and faithfulness of

^c 2 Cor. v. 21.

^e Acts xiii. 39. with Rom. v. 1, 2.

^d Phil. iv. 6.

^f 1 John ii. 12.

God, together with the ability and willingness of Christ to save all who come unto God by him, are the proper grounds of joy, irrespective of any change actually wrought in us. We say not that a believer may not *afterwards* have much joy in the testimony of his own conscience that he has made a progress in the divine life; (for St. Paul himself experienced *this* joy^s;) but the affiancing of his soul on Christ interests him in all that Christ has done and suffered for him, and gives him an immediate title to partake of the fatted calf, which his heavenly Father has prepared for him. "Being delivered from the horrible pit, and having his feet set upon the rock, a new song instantly should proceed from his mouth, even praise and thanksgiving to our God^h." Nor should that song ever cease; because the efficacy of his Redeemer's sacrifice will never cease. We are bidden to "rejoice in the Lord *always*," yea "again and again to rejoice:" and indeed, humiliation and joy must be united in all our services to the very end of time — — — as they will be united even in heaven itself, where we shall cast our crowns at the Redeemer's feet, and sing to all eternity, "To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen."]

At the close of that solemn service we particularly notice,

III. Their reverential obeisance—

[When they had made an end of offering, "the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped." This remarkable termination of their worship indicated a grateful sense of the inestimable privilege which they had enjoyed of drawing nigh to God—an humble acknowledgment that they, and all that belonged to them, were the Lord's—and a determination of heart henceforth to dedicate themselves unreservedly to his service.

And thus it is that we should close our worship, whensoever we draw nigh to God in his public ordinances¹. It is painful to see persons going from the house of God without a due sense of the awful solemnities in which they have been engaged. The light and airy manner with which persons renew their conferences with each other upon the common topics of the day, demonstrates, that their worship has been by no means such as God requires: had they really felt as redeemed sinners ought to feel, the savour of that intercourse with heaven would not so soon be lost. O, if men did but reflect on the mercy vouchsafed to them, in being permitted to sprinkle the blood of

^s 2 Cor. i. 12.

^h Ps. xl. 2, 3.

¹ See that admirable pattern, 1 Chron. xxix. 14.

Christ upon the altar, to transfer all their guilt to him, and to receive from him the gift of his unspotted righteousness; if they duly considered what a right the Lord Jesus Christ had acquired over them in having bought them with his blood, and how much they are bound to glorify him with their bodies and their spirits which are his; methinks they would depart from the house of God with a holy solemnity upon their mind, and would continue in their way homeward secretly to commune with their God, and to harrow in by meditation and prayer the seed which has been sown upon their hearts. For want of this, even religious people often lose all the benefit of the ordinances which they have been privileged to enjoy. Earnestly would we entreat all persons to attend to these suggestions; and to bear in mind, whether they enter into the house of God or depart from it, that it is the God of heaven and earth with whom they have to do, and to whom they must shortly give an account of all these privileges which by the generality are so lightly esteemed.

How the people remembered the vows that were upon them, was evident from the liberality with which they immediately presented their offerings to the Lord^k. O let us give up our whole selves to him a living sacrifice: and from a constraining sense of redeeming love, let us henceforth live, not unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again.]

^k If any Collection be made on the occasion, the zeal and liberality of the worshippers, ver. 32, 33. may well be proposed as a pattern. Or, if the occasion required, the different Officers of the Church or Parish might be exhorted, from the example of the Priests, and of the Levites in particular, to exert themselves in their respective callings to serve and honour God.

CCCCXXIII.

AFTER CONFIRMATION.

2 Chron. xxix. 31. *Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the Lord, come near and bring sacrifices and thank-offerings into the house of the Lord.*

RELIGION is the brightest ornament of every state. Solomon was never more truly encircled with glory, than when he led the devotions of his people at the dedication of the temple: nor was Hezekiah

at any period of his reign more honourably employed, than when he was purifying that temple from the abominations which had been introduced into it by his father Ahaz. The exhortation in our text was delivered by him to the whole congregation of Israel, after that the sacrifices for the purification of the temple had been offered. And to you who are of the younger part of our audience they may with great propriety be addressed, after the services which you have this day been called to perform.

With a more immediate view to your benefit, we will consider,

I. The act in which you have been engaged—

You have been to the bishop to be confirmed: and this is,

1. A solemn act—

[From the levity of too many who attend on these occasions, it may be thought to be a ceremony of no importance. But it is a most solemn transaction between God and your souls. You have this day been taking upon yourselves the vows which were made in your behalf at your baptism; and have been devoting yourselves to God as his servants: and, whether you have been sincere or not in the performance of the duty, the consequences of it will be very important: if you have given yourselves to the Lord in sincerity and truth, he has accepted you to his favour, and numbered you among his children: but, if you have lied unto God with your lips, you have riveted upon your souls your former iniquities, and provoked God to give you up to greater obduracy*— — —]

2. A reasonable act—

[The first-fruits of every thing were the Lord's: nor could any man appropriate them to his own use without the greatest impiety. Thus are the first-fruits of your time and strength to be given up to God. It is generally thought that the Jewish children at about twelve years of age went up to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord in a more solemn manner: and we know that our blessed Lord went thither at this age, that he might in a more peculiar way than he had ever before done, engage in the services of "his Father's house." We cannot do better than follow his example in this particular. As soon as we have arrived at an age when we are capable of understanding

* Isai. xxviii. 22. Rom. i. 21.

and executing the vows that are upon us, we should go up to the house of the Lord, and there solemnly acknowledge our obligations to serve our God, and implore from him the grace and strength that shall be needful for us. This, we are expressly told, is "a reasonable service^b."

3. An irrevocable act—

[It was an established law, that if anything whatsoever had been devoted to the Lord, it could not be recalled. Least of all then can you be liberated from the engagement which you have this day entered into, and which would have been binding upon you, even though you had never obeyed the call of your diocesan in relation to it — — —]

But confirmation is to be the commencement of a new and more determined course of devotedness to God. I will therefore proceed to mark,

II. The duty which yet remains to be performed—

The act in which you have this day been engaged must be,

1. Continued—

[The whole remainder of your lives is the time for the performance of your vows. There never will arrive a period when you are absolved from them, or when you are at liberty to relax your attention to them. Every morning and evening were the sacrifices offered in the temple, and a double number on the seventh day: so must every day begin and end with fresh surrenders of yourselves to God; and the Sabbath in particular must be a day of more than ordinary communion with him. "If you look back, after having put your hand to the plough, you are not fit for the kingdom of God:" yea, "if you draw back, it is to certain and everlasting perdition^c."]

2. Progressive—

[After all had been done that was necessary for the purification of the temple, Hezekiah called on the people to present sacrifices and thank-offerings unto the Lord: and, in consequence of this exhortation, they were presented in great numbers. The sacrifices which God desires of you, are, not sheep and oxen, but the offering of a free, a contrite, a devoted heart^d. And, as the first offerings which were presented, were from duty and necessity, and the last from a superabundant zeal for God, and gratitude to his name, so are your surrenders

^b Rom. xii. 1.

^c Luke ix. 62. Heb. x. 38, 39.

^d See Rom. xii. 1. before cited.

of your hearts to God to be daily more willing, more grateful, more entire* — — —]

APPLICATION—

1. To the young, we recommend the counsel of Hezekiah—

[Never think you can do enough for Him, who has bought you with his blood — — —]

2. To the more advanced we recommend his admirable example—

[Whatever influence you have, use it diligently for the Lord — — —]

* Isai. xliv. 3—5. Jer. l. 4, 5.

CCCCXXIV.

HEZEKIAH'S ZEAL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.

2 Chron. xxx. 1—11. *And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel. For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation. So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the passover unto the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written. So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. And be not like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you.*

For if ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him. So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem.

INFLUENCE is a talent of vast importance; but it is often most abused, where it exists in the highest degree. Kings and princes are rarely to be found amongst those who are foremost in the work of reformation: and, where their exertions are used, they are actuated as much by political principles as by those which are religious. Here however we see a monarch uniting with all his princes in a work of piety, in which politics bore no part at all. Hezekiah, not content with calling on his own subjects to serve the Lord, sought to bring his very enemies to the same blessed state, even those enemies who not long before had "smitten them with a great slaughter," even "with a rage that reached up to heaven^a." The account is so circumstantial and so beautiful, that I have comprised it all in my text; which will lead me to shew,

I. The efforts he used in the service of his God—

The object he sought to accomplish was one of primary importance—

[The passover was the greatest of all the Jewish feasts, as the mercies which it was intended to commemorate were the greatest that had ever been vouchsafed to that people. The destruction of the Egyptian first-born was, as you know, confined to them. The Israelites throughout the whole land were exempt from the judgment inflicted on all others without exception. In order to their deliverance, they were to kill a lamb, and sprinkle the posts and lintels of their doors with its blood: and then the destroying angel was to pass over their houses without inflicting a stroke either on man or beast that was so protected. In commemoration of this wonderful event the

^a 2 Chron. xxviii. 5, 9.

passover was to be kept with great strictness in all future ages. But it had been shamefully neglected during the reign of his father Ahaz; and was now therefore appointed to be kept with peculiar solemnity. This ordinance above all others typified our redemption through the blood of Christ. The appointment of God was, that it should be kept at Jerusalem: and this command was as binding upon the ten tribes of Israel as it was upon Judah and Benjamin. He summoned all therefore, as well the tribes of Israel who were not under his government, as the two tribes who were his immediate subjects, to engage in this holy duty: and he spared neither trouble nor expense to attain his end.]

The way in which he endeavoured to accomplish his end was peculiarly amiable and praiseworthy—

[Though a king, he used not so much the language of authority as of affectionate counsel and entreaty: "Turn again," said he, "unto the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel." "Be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were." He reminds them of the bitter consequences of their past departure from God, consequences which they could not but trace to that source, since the very judgments which God's prophets had denounced against them were actually visible in the desolations that were come upon them, a great part of their nation having been already taken captive by the king of Assyria. He then urges every argument that could influence an ingenuous mind. He assures them, that God would still be gracious to them, if they would but return to him: yea, that he would even restore to their own land those who had been taken captive, if they would but seek him with their whole hearts. In a word, he entreats them to "yield up themselves unreservedly unto God," in an assured expectation, that, if they returned to him in a way of penitential sorrow, he would return to them in a way of love and mercy.

Now the whole of this affords as bright a pattern of wisdom, and piety, and love, as is to be found in all the Jewish records.]

Let us then proceed to contemplate,

II. The success with which those efforts were attended—

This was far from being so complete as might have been expected. Some only "mocked his messengers, and laughed them to scorn"—

[However closely we examine the message which he sent, we shall find in it nothing that could give just occasion for ridicule or contempt. But ungodly men, even in self-defence, deride every thing which savours of piety. They have done

so in every age. When Lot entreated his sons-in-law to escape out of Sodom, "he seemed," we are told, "as one who mocked to his sons-in-law," so ridiculous were his exhortations in their eyes. In precisely the same way were all the messages delivered by the prophets regarded; till God was provoked to give up his people to utter desolation^b. It might be supposed that the infinite perfections of our blessed Lord should disarm such malice; and that his words at least would be universally received. But many who heard them regarded him only as a deceiver and a demoniac. The very Pharisees, who from their knowledge of the Scriptures might have been supposed to form a more correct judgment, derided him as much as others; because they were addicted to the sins which he reproved^c. The holy Apostles shared the same fate with their Divine Master; and when most "speaking the words of truth and soberness" were most virulently derided as babblers and as fools^d. And thus it is at the present hour. Every man who seeks to reclaim a world that lieth in wickedness will be reproached and persecuted, and, generally speaking, will be persecuted in proportion to his fidelity.]

Some however complied with his exhortations—

[Among the tribes of Judah and Benjamin there was a great unanimity in turning to the Lord, because "the hand of God was with them, to give them" an obedient heart. And from amongst the tribes of Israel also many "humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem." These kept the feast with great joy and gladness^e: yea, so did they delight in the pious work, that when they had fulfilled the week which God had appointed for the celebration of the feast, they were anxious of themselves to continue it another week^f, notwithstanding the protracting of the period interfered with the pressing engagements of the harvest. Say whether *this* was not a rich compensation to Hezekiah for all the ridicule which the contemners of his piety had cast upon him? Yes, if one soul be of more value than the whole world, no doubt but that the welfare of so many souls was in his eyes an abundant recompence for all his toil and labour.]

That we may not confine our thoughts to the events of that day, but may render them PROFITABLE to our own souls, I shall consider myself as a messenger sent on a similar occasion to you, not from an earthly monarch, but from the King of kings—

^b 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. ^c Luke xvi. 14. ^d Acts xxvi. 24, 25.

^e ver. 21.

^f ver. 23.

[You would I call to keep a passover unto the Lord: for "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." O consider the benefits you derive from his blood sprinkled on your souls! — — — Think of yourselves as the very first-born whom he has redeemed unto God, and who are Lord's peculiar portion — — — Think how grievously this mystery has been neglected by you and by all around you — — — And how manifest is his indignation against the contemners of his love and mercy! See, and tell me, are not the great mass around you enslaved by sin, and carried captive by the devil at his will? — — — Have not you yourselves too much reason to fear his displeasure on account of your multiplied iniquities? Turn then unto him in penitence and prayer; yea, turn unto him with your whole hearts. I would urge this by every consideration that is proper to influence the human mind. Think how gracious your Redeemer is, and ready both to receive you to mercy, and to deliver you out of the hands of your spiritual enemies — — — Think too how awful will be the consequence of continuing to rebel against him — — — "Be no longer stiff-necked," but turn to him, and "yield yourselves entirely to him." "This is your reasonable service:" and if ungodly men deride and mock your piety, let it suffice you that you shall at least have the approbation of your God — — —]

And to you who have influence let me say, Exert that influence in behalf of all to whom it can extend. Use it abroad as well as at home; amongst enemies, as well as friends. Seek to recover the dispersed of Israel and of Judah to the service of their God, that they may participate with you the mercies purchased for them by the blood of the Paschal Lamb — — —]

§ Rom. xii. 1.

CCCCXXV.

GOD'S CONDESCENSION TO THE UPRIGHT.

2 Chron. xxx. 18—20. *Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.*

HERE is the fruit of holy zeal. Not a month had Hezekiah been invested with royal authority, before he set himself to repair the evils which had been committed by his father Ahaz. Almost incredible were the abominations which had been wrought by that wicked prince, "destroying the vessels of the

sanctuary, and shutting up the very doors of the temple, and erecting altars in every corner of Jerusalem^a:" and now Hezekiah, his son, gave orders for the re-opening of the temple, and sanctifying it afresh in all its parts: and in the short space of eight days it was accomplished. He then determined to keep the passover, which had been neglected and suspended for many years: and, not content with summoning his own subjects to observe that blessed ordinance, he sent messengers to all the ten tribes of Israel, to invite them to unite with him in the observance of it. The greater part of that apostate nation poured contempt upon his message: but a large number yielded to his entreaties, and came to join in that divine service. God had appointed, that, if any, by being on a journey, or sick, were incapacitated to attend that ordinance on the fourteenth day of the first month, he might come with the same acceptance on the fourteenth day of the second month. Of this concession Hezekiah availed himself, to bring together as many as possible from amongst the ten tribes, as well as of his own subjects. But multitudes from amongst the ten tribes, being called so suddenly, had not time to sanctify themselves from the pollutions which they had contracted: and no alternative was left them, but to serve God in a less acceptable manner, or to neglect his service altogether. To the former they were encouraged by King Hezekiah: but, perceiving God was offended with them for coming in so unfit a way, he prayed to God for them, that his judgments might be removed from them, and that they might be restored to the divine favour. This prayer was heard and answered; and the answer given to it will afford me a fit occasion to consider,

I. The leading features of this history—

They are two:

1. The jealousy of God respecting his own ordinances and appointments—

^a 2 Chron. xxviii. 2—4, 24.

[It was ordained by God that none who were, by whatever means, in a state of ceremonial uncleanness, should eat of the paschal feast. But from the suddenness of the invitation given to those of the ten tribes, it happened that many were ceremonially unclean. This was ascertained after they had come up to Jerusalem: and, as this was the second month, no other opportunity would be afforded them to celebrate that ordinance for nearly a whole year; so that they must either be sent back to their own country, under a state of grievous disappointment, or be admitted without a suitable preparation. The latter was the alternative adopted: and God, in some way not known to us, but fully known to Hezekiah and the people themselves, expressed his displeasure against them on account of it^b. And this he did, in order to shew, that no man can be justified in the commission of presumptuous sin; and that no ordinance of his should ever be wilfully violated by any man with impunity. (I apprehend that Hezekiah erred in not consulting Jehovah, as Moses and others had done, to obtain specific directions in this emergency.) It was no excuse to say, that *this* was a mere ceremonial enactment: it was ordained of God; and that was sufficient: for the history of all former ages had proved, beyond a possibility of doubt, that it was at the peril of man to violate, knowingly, any, even the least, of God's commandments. It was but a *positive* injunction (not a *moral* one) that Adam in Paradise^c, and that the Sabbath-breaker (who was stoned for his offence)^d, transgressed; and that Uzzah also, who was struck dead upon the spot, presumed to violate^e. These instances abundantly demonstrated the evil and danger of departing from any ordinance of God, however trifling that ordinance might be thought. And we have the very same intimation given to us under the Christian dispensation: for our blessed Lord has left it as his unalterable determination, that "whosoever shall break one of the least of God's commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven^f," that is, be accounted the furthest from it. We must never, therefore, consider any commandment of God as small: for, whatever it may be, his authority is vested in it; and it must be obeyed at the peril of our souls^g. If ever there was an occasion on which an ordinance of God might be overlooked, methinks, it was that very occasion to which my text refers:

^b God executed judgment on the Philistines who had taken captive the ark (1 Sam. v. 6—12.): and similar judgments were inflicted on the Church at Corinth, for an irreverent attendance on the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. xi. 30).

^c Gen. ii. 17.

^d Numb. xv. 32—36.

^e 1 Chron. xv. 13.

^f Matt. v. 19.

^g Jam. ii. 10, 11.

but if that could not be, without bringing on the transgressors the divine displeasure, much less can any be overlooked at this day, when only two ordinances, together with the Sabbath, are left for our observance.]

2. The condescension of God towards the upright, under their manifold short-comings and defects—

[The persons had really “set their hearts to seek God, the Lord God of their fathers, though they were not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.” Though, therefore, God shewed that this was no excuse for their transgression, he heard the prayer of Hezekiah in their behalf, and healed them, precisely as he healed Abimelech and his domestics, when the general integrity of the offender was made known^b. Thus does God shew, that he is “not extreme to mark what is done amiss;” for, if he were, “who could ever stand before him?” Our blessed Lord apologized for his disciples at the very time that they were guilty of most criminal neglect: “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak!” And the same tender regard he will shew to us also, under our manifold infirmities. He knows, that, though “the spirit lusteth against the flesh, the flesh still continues to lust against the spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would^c!” and that, even when “we delight in the Law of God after our inward man,” there is yet a law in our members warring against the law in our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members; so that even the best of men are often constrained to cry, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me^k?” Were we “to regard iniquity in our hearts, no prayer, whether of others or of our own, would be accepted by the Lord^l.” “The retaining of even a right hand or a right eye,” with deliberate determination, would exclude us from all hope of his favour^m: but, if we be really upright before him, and with sincerity of heart bemoan our defects, “he will be our Advocate with the Father, and approve himself to us as the propitiation for our sinsⁿ.” He is appointed of God to “bear the iniquity of our holy things^o,” and he will so bear it, that, if mourned over and resisted, it shall never prevent our ultimate acceptance before God.]

These being the principal features of the history, I proceed to notice,

II. The leading instructions to be derived from it—

^b Gen. xx. 17, 18.

^c Gal. v. 17.

^k Rom. vii. 22—24.

^l Ps. lxvi. 18.

^m Mark ix. 43—48.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 1.

^o Exod. xxviii. 38.

I will here confine myself to two :

1. That we are not to confide in duties, because we perform them *as well as we can*—

[The Israelites on this occasion did *what they could*: but this did not justify them before God. And, for argument sake, I will suppose that we also, in our respective spheres, have done the same. Still I must say, that, if this were the case, “we are only unprofitable servants,” and have nothing to boast of in the sight of our Divine Master. But who, I would ask, has done as well as he could? The paschal feast, which commemorated the redemption of Israel from Egypt, typified our redemption from a far sorer bondage, by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: as the Apostle says, “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth^p.” Inquire then, I pray you, whether, in remembering this stupendous mercy, at the Lord’s Supper, or at the period of our annual commemoration of it, or in the daily habit of your minds, you have been so careful to purge out all the old leaven of your corrupt nature, that, when inspected by the eye of the heart-searching God, you will be found “cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.” Who must not shrink back from such an examination as this? Who can ever stand such a test as this? And, if we cannot, what remains for us, but shame and confusion of face in the presence of an holy God? If even holy Job could not endure such a scrutiny, if not even he could answer God for “one action of a thousand,” and was constrained to acknowledge, that, “if he were to justify himself, his own mouth would condemn him^q,” assuredly nothing is left for us but, with the convicted leper, to put our hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust, crying, “Unclean, unclean.” Let me, then, affectionately guard you, my Brethren, against “trusting in yourselves as righteous,” because of your diligence in any duties whatsoever. Do not mistake me; I would not decry diligence in duties: on the contrary, I would that every one amongst us were as diligent and abundant in them as ever the Apostle Paul was: but if we place any dependence on them before God, we totally destroy all their value, and render our very obedience a stumbling-block, over which we shall fall to our eternal condemnation. If we possessed all the righteousness of the Apostle Paul, we must renounce it all in point of dependence, and

^p 1 Cor. v. 7, 8. If this were a *Sacrament Sermon*, or for *Easter-day*, the appropriate hint here given should be somewhat amplified.

^q Job ix. 2, 20.

Lev. xiii. 45.

“seek to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, but his¹.”]

2. Not to be discouraged from duties, because we cannot perform them *so well as we would*—

[A truly pious man can be satisfied with nothing short of absolute perfection. But this is no reason that he should be discouraged *in*, and still less be diverted *from*, the path of duty. If God himself “do not despise the day of small things,” much less should *we*¹. Under the Law, it was forbidden to offer to the Lord, honey, or leaven, or any beast that was mutilated: yet, as a votive-offering, every one of them might be presented with acceptance². This shews how God will condescend to the infirmities of those who endeavour to honour him according to their power. A burnt-offering, of whatever kind it were, must be perfect; because it could not otherwise atone for sin, or shadow forth the Saviour, who was to die for the sins of the whole world: but, as a voluntary offering, its imperfections were overlooked; and the offerer was accepted of the Lord. Know ye, then, Brethren, that, as where persons had not a lamb to offer, God accepted “two turtle-doves or young pigeons,” and even a small portion of meal³, so will he receive at your hands the imperfect services you present, “accepting them according to what you have, and not according to what you have not⁴.” A clear distinction is to be made by you between the sins of infirmity, which still cleave to the most pious soul, and those which were committed in an unregenerate state with the full consent of his will. Respecting a person under the influence of the latter, Christ says, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me:” but respecting one that, in despite of all his exertions, is overtaken with the former, he says, “He that is washed, needeth not, save to wash his feet; but is clean every whit:” that is, a man who has been bathing, does not need again the same total immersion which he has just recently experienced; but, however few his steps have been from the bath, he has contracted some defilement, from which he requires a fresh ablution. Thus a saint, that has been washed in “the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness,” is cleansed, in a general view, from all his guilt: but, from his remaining infirmities, every step he takes in this corrupt world will more or less defile him: and if he habitually apply to himself the blood of Christ for that end, and cry to God for pardon in the Saviour’s name, he shall be regarded as pure in the sight of God, and shall to all eternity be accepted of him.]

¹ Phil. iii. 9.

² Zech. iv. 10.

³ See Lev. vii. 13. xxii. 23. and xxiii. 17.

⁴ Lev. v. 7, 11.

⁵ 2 Cor. viii. 12.

APPLICATION—

[Thus, then, you see, Brethren, the just medium between presumption and despondency. You are no more to trifle with sin than if there were no mercy attainable by transgressors; and, on the other hand, you are no more to despair of mercy than if no judgment whatever had been at any time denounced against transgressors. Your faith must never so prevail as to exclude fear; nor is your fear ever to reign so as to prevent the exercise of faith. In the whole of your deportment, you are ever to keep in combined exercise, confidence with humility, and vigilance with composure.]

CCCCXXVI.

DELIGHT IN ORDINANCES.

2 Chron. xxx. 22, 23. They did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace-offerings, and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness.

IN this chapter, and in that which precedes it, we are informed that Hezekiah, as soon as he came to the throne, set himself to repair the temple, which during the reign of his father Ahaz had been greatly neglected, and to restore the worship of Jehovah, which had been utterly superseded by the worship of idols. He lost no time in sanctifying the vessels which had been desecrated and defiled: and he appointed a feast unto the Lord, to be observed by all his people.

Now here we have,

I. A most valuable record—

That we may view it in all its parts, let us distinctly notice,

1. The feast appointed—

[It was the passover, and the feast of unleavened bread which was invariably connected with it. The feast of passover commemorated the redemption of Israel from Egypt; and the feast of unleavened bread intimated the holiness which became the people who had been so redeemed. But the time for observing these feasts was past. The passover should have been

killed on the fourteenth day of the first month^a; and on the same day, at even, should the feast of unleavened bread have commenced^b: but it was not practicable to get the temple ready by that time; and therefore Hezekiah applied to the nation at large the liberty conceded to individuals; in case they were incapacitated for the observance of the feast at the proper time, to observe it in the second month^c. Even this delay was not sufficient for all who were desirous of observing the feast; so that many came up to it without that measure of purification which the law required: and it was only in answer to Hezekiah's prayer that this violation of the law was pardoned^d. But the zeal of Hezekiah was truly commendable. Indeed, he was not satisfied with summoning his own subjects to the feast: he sought to bring also his brethren of the ten tribes to a participation of the same holy exercises and heavenly enjoyments: and, though "his messengers were laughed to scorn" and mocked by many, there were many who accepted his invitation, and availed themselves of the opportunity afforded them of serving and honouring "the Lord God of their fathers^e."]]

2. The observance of it—

[A spirit of piety prevailed to a very great extent: all, king, princes, priests and people, seemed to vie with each other in their endeavours to exalt and honour God: and in their services we behold that which gives to every service its highest value—a due mixture of humiliation with their gratitude and joy: "they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace-offerings, and *making confession* to the Lord God of their fathers^f." This is a point deserving of most especial notice. Humility is the characteristic feature of the worship in heaven: for all, whether saints or angels, fall upon their faces before the throne, whilst with united voices they sing praise to God and to the Lamb^g. Such was the worship of all the assembly at this time; and it was productive of the most exalted joy^h: for every prayer they offered entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts, and descended in blessings on the heads of those who offered itⁱ.]

3. Its continuance—

[According to the original institution, the feast was to last but seven days: but so full of joy were their souls, that the whole assembly took counsel, after the example of Solomon, to protract it seven more days^k. And not only did Hezekiah

^a Exod. xii. 6.

^b Exod. xii. 18.

^c ver. 1—4. with Numb. ix. 10, 11.

^d ver. 17—20.

^e ver. 10.

^f ver. 22.

^g Rev. v. 8. and vii. 11.

^h ver. 26.

ⁱ ver. 27.

^k ver. 23. with 1 Kings viii. 65.

and the princes concur in this proposal, but, by their extraordinary liberality, they enabled the congregation to carry it into effect: for Hezekiah gave them one thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave one thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep. During the whole of this time, even fourteen days, were the same holy exercises continued, none grudging the time that was lost to their worldly occupations, or becoming weary of an employment so foreign to their former habits.]

And who does not see in all this,

II. A most instructive lesson?—

Surely here is a lesson,

1. To the higher ranks of society—

[Behold the king and the princes exerting all their influence to diffuse throughout the land a spirit of piety; and not in their own land only, but throughout a nation that was hostile to them¹. What an example was here to all, however exalted their rank, or powerful their authority! And can wealth or power be better employed than in such acts as these? But let it not be supposed that this example is instructive to kings and princes only: whatever be the measure of our property or influence, our obligation to improve them for the diffusion of religion is still the same; and our liberality should be “according to our power,” whether it be more or less. True, indeed, if we engage with holy zeal in the service of our God, we may expect that an ungodly world will “laugh us to scorn and mock us.” But we should rise superior to such treatment, and rejoice that we are “counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ’s sake.” Our only thought should be, How we may honour God: and, if only He be glorified, we should not regard any sacrifice which we may be called to make for so desirable an end.]

2. To the community at large—

[Here we see how we should perform our religious duties. Not that it would be advisable for us to protract them to an inconvenient length; or to neglect our worldly callings, for the sake of prosecuting beyond reasonable bounds the services in which we are engaged. There is a season for every thing; and every duty should be attended to in its season. We are to labour six days, so far as the necessities of ourselves and our families may require it, and to rest on the Sabbath-day: but we may, and must, carry *the spirit of religion* into every thing, and *in that sense* protract our religious services to the latest

¹ 2 Chron. xxviii. 6, 8.

hour of our lives. Nor should we grudge a reasonable portion of our time to religious ordinances, whether public or private. Beyond all doubt, we should consecrate a portion of every day to the immediate service of our God; and be willing, also, to enlarge that portion, when any particular occasion may demand it: but it is the service of the heart which God *now* chiefly requires; and *that* can never be carried to excess. We must, however, especially take care to combine with every service a due measure of penitential sorrow. We must never for a moment forget that we are sinners; nor ever offer to God any sacrifice of which penitential sorrow does not form a very essential part.

And now, what shall I say to *you*, my Brethren? Would to God that I could see you all in the very frame in which the whole people of Israel were on this occasion! And is there not abundant reason for it? Is not the restoration of divine ordinances, after so long a suspension of them, a blessing? Above all, Is not "Christ our Passover sacrificed for us? and is not *this* a call to keep the feast?" Let us, then, "keep it, not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Then may you hope, that "your joy, like Israel's, shall be full;" and shall be not only a preparation for future blessedness, but also an earnest of heaven in your souls.]

CCCCXXVII.

HEZEKIAH'S CHARACTER.

2 Chron. xxxi. 20, 21. *Thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.*

RELIGION, when set before us in the precept, is thought impracticable: but, when it is embodied in the life of some eminent saint, it commends itself to us as in the highest degree estimable, and its yoke appears to us both light and easy. In a person like Hezekiah, at the early age of twenty-five, (when the mind is too generally carried away by thoughtless gaiety,) presiding over a kingdom, with all possible means of sensual gratification at his command, it does indeed approve itself to us as lovely, and as

worthy to be cultivated by every child of man. For the purpose of elevating your souls to the pursuit of it, I will propose to your consideration,

I. The character of Hezekiah as here drawn—

Many of the saints were eminently distinguished above their brethren by some peculiar grace, which they exercised in an extraordinary degree. Hezekiah excelled in faith: "He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him^a." But in the passage before us, his character is drawn more at large. We behold,

1. The objects of his attention—

[Placed at the head of an empire, he laboured to promote the benefit of his subjects by a wise and just administration of his government. But his views were not confined to objects of temporal importance merely: he sought to repair the mischiefs of his father's reign, and to bring back his people to the knowledge and enjoyment of the only true God. He neglected not what was *politically* "good and right and true:" but he also strove to accomplish whatever was "good and right and truth *before the Lord his God*." The passover, which had been instituted to commemorate the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, and had been ordained of God to be observed every year at an appointed time, had long been neglected. He therefore called the priests and Levites to the performance of their duty^b; he ordered them to sanctify the house of God, which had been profaned by all manner of abominations^c, and to prepare all the offerings which were necessary for the occasion; he himself setting them an example by a most munificent contribution of cattle for that end^d. Nor was he content with effecting this amongst his own people. He exerted his influence to bring also the ten tribes of Israel, over whom he had no control, to a sense of their duty, and to a concurrence with him in this holy work. In a word, he considered himself as a servant of the Most High God; and for the advancement of his glory he exerted all the influence which his high station gave him.]

2. The manner of his exertion—

[This is particularly specified; and, indeed, it deserves especial notice: "in every work that he began, *he did it with*

^a 2 Kings xviii. 5.

^b 2 Chron. xxix. 4, 5.

^c 2 Chron. xxix. 15, 16.

^d 2 Chron. xxx. 24.

all his heart." He did not satisfy himself with giving commands to others: he himself led the way, and enforced, by his example, the precepts which he issued. In the very first month after his coming to the throne of Judah, he set to work with all his might: and in the second month, the fourteenth day of the month, all was ready for the observance of the ordinance: and though his zeal brought upon him much obloquy and contempt from ungodly men^e, he persevered with undiminished ardour, and kept such a passover as had not been seen from the time of Solomon to that day^f. It was in this way that "he began" the work of the Lord: and in this blessed course did he continue to the end of life. In fact, it was his zeal for the service of God which caused him to weep so bitterly, when he was informed by the prophet that the time was come for him to die^g. It was not that he was afraid of death: for he could "appeal to God that he had walked before him in truth and with a perfect heart:" but he saw that the reformation which he had begun was likely to be stopped as soon as he should be removed; and therefore he implored a prolongation of his term on earth, that he might consolidate and complete the work he had begun.]

3. The issue of his labours—

[In my text we are told, "he prospered." The kingdom, when he first assumed the reins of government, was in a most desolate condition; subjected, in fact, to the Assyrian monarch^h; from whose power, however, he delivered itⁱ; and, from being grievously impoverished, he raised it to a high degree of wealth and power^k. The moral change effected in it was most remarkable: at the time of his father's death, the land was wholly given to idolatry and all its attendant abominations: but in a short time, through God's blessing on his endeavours, all the vestiges of idolatry were swept away, not only from his own dominions, but from the tribes of Ephraim also and Manasseh, who were independent of him.]

Having viewed the character here drawn, let us contemplate,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

Surely we may learn from hence,

1. The extent of our duty—

[All of us should, doubtless, be peculiarly attentive to the offices to which, in our respective stations, we are called. From

^e 2 Chron. xxx. 10.

^g 2 Kings xx. 1—3.

ⁱ 2 Kings xviii. 7.

^f 2 Chron. xxx. 26.

^h 2 Chron. xxix. 8.

^k 2 Chron. xxxii. 27—30.

the king upon the throne, to the lowest subject in his dominions, this is required. As in the natural body, so also in the body politic, all, from the head to the foot, have their proper functions, which it becomes them diligently to discharge. But all, without exception, are bound, in the first instance, to serve their God, and to do whatever is good and right and true in his sight. "Whatsoever things are true," says the Apostle, "whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things¹." Nor should our efforts terminate on ourselves: we should seek the best interests of all around us; and labour especially to bring them to the knowledge and enjoyment of their God. As Hezekiah called his people to the observance of the passover, so should we endeavour to call men's attention to the Gospel, and to "Christ as our Passover that has been sacrificed for us." Never can influence be used for a more salutary end than this: and every one of us, according to the measure of influence that he possesses, is bound to exert it in this way for the Lord his God.]

2. The proper mode of engaging in it—

[“Whatever our hand findeth to do, we should do it with all our might^m.” It is not by listless endeavours that we can hope to succeed: we must “strive for the mastery,” if we would overcome our corruptions; and “fight a good fight,” if we would subdue our enemies; and “run, as in a race,” if we would obtain the prize that is held forth to us in the Gospel. All of these images imply the most strenuous exertion in the Christian life. Nor will it suffice to “begin” well: we must go on, and continue to the end, if we would secure the approbation of our Godⁿ.]

3. The certain issue of our endeavours—

[Never did any one thus labour, without obtaining a successful issue. To those who strive to do *the whole will* of God, and prosecute their object with *their whole heart*, a failure is impossible. They *must* “prosper:” God will never suffer such persons to run in vain, and “labour in vain^o.” As far as respects the benefiting of others, he may not indeed attain all he proposes to himself: but as far as respects his own soul, he cannot but flourish: he will necessarily grow in grace: “his peace also will flow down like a river:” “his joy will become

¹ Phil. iv. 8.

^m Eccl. ix. 10.

ⁿ Gal. vi. 9.

^o 1 Cor. xv. 58.

unspeakable and glorified;" and his weight of glory will be in proportion to his attainments and his services.]

REFLECTIONS—

1. How rare is this character!

[Persons attending to their worldly callings, and prosecuting them with their whole hearts, and prospering in them, are to be found in every place. But where do we find persons labouring thus in spiritual things, and making "their profiting to appear unto all?" Look at the generality, and you behold no progress in them from year to year: and even amongst those whom, in the judgment of charity, we should call believers, there is, alas! far less of holy zeal and spiritual advancement than their profession requires.]

2. How honourable is this character!

[Let a person be really zealous for the Lord his God, and profane sinners will be sure to mock and deride him, as they did Hezekiah and his agents. But still they will honour him in their hearts, even as "Herod feared John," at the very time that he consigned him to prison and to death. But if not, still, at his departure, his loss will be felt and mourned as a public calamity. The Jews built the sepulchres of departed prophets, at the time that they persecuted and put to death the living ones. And it is no uncommon thing, in this day, to behold a repetition of that farce. As for the honour itself, it is of no value to the saints, whether dead or living: but it is a testimony for God, that his servants are indeed "worthy of all honour," and that "the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour."]

3. How blessed is this character!

[Compare Hezekiah with his father Ahaz, or his son Manasseh. They possessed the kingdom, even as he: but how differently did they exert their influence! They lived but for the gratification of their own malignant passions; whereas he lived only for the welfare of his people, and the honour of his God. And can any one doubt which of them was the happiest? Hear the mournings of Manasseh, and they will satisfy your mind: or, if you could now behold the state of Ahaz, it would leave no doubt who is the happier man—he who lives for God, or he who lives only for himself.]

CCCCXXVIII.

HUMILIATION FOR THE SIN OF THE HEART.

2 Chron. xxxii. 26. *Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart.*

THE best of men are liable to fall through temptation, but they will deeply bewail any sin into which they have been betrayed. Hezekiah was a man of very distinguished piety^a; but he was not sufficiently aware, that his integrity was the effect of divine grace, and not of human power. God therefore left him for a moment to the influence of his own heart^b. In consequence of this he soon gave a proof of his inherent depravity; but, on discovering his sin, he instantly humbled himself for it before God.

We shall shew,

I. What were the grounds of Hezekiah's humiliation—

The sin committed by him does not in human estimation appear great—

[The princes of Babylon sent to congratulate him on his recovery: he received them with all the kindness and courtesy that he could express, and shewed them "every thing in his dominions" that could afford them entertainment^c.]

But his conduct was exceeding sinful in the sight of God; for in it,

1. He sought his own glory—

[Hezekiah evidently thought of nothing else at that time. He wished to shew how great a man he was, in order that his alliance might be courted, and his power feared. Now this would have been highly criminal in any man^d, but it was especially so in him, at that particular juncture. He had just been at the borders of the grave; and therefore should have been more impressed with the vanity of earthly grandeur, and should have seen the folly and wickedness of *priding himself* in things so empty, so worthless, so transient.]

2. He sought his own glory in preference to God's honour—

[He had now a happy opportunity of magnifying the God of Israel. He might have told the ambassadors, what God

^a 2 Kings xx. 3.
^c 2 Kings xx. 13.

^b ver. 31.
^d Prov. xxv. 27.

had done for his nation in former times; he might have recited the wonderful restoration which God had at this time afforded to himself in particular, together with *the stupendous miracle* with which the promise of that recovery had been confirmed* — — — he might have commended Jehovah as an answerer of prayer† — — — and in this way have exalted him above all the gods of the heathen; and surely the mercies that had been vouchsafed unto him, demanded such a tribute: but he was pitifully occupied about SELF, and basely preferred *his own* honour before God's.]

3. He sought his own glory before the good of his friends—

[The ambassadors were shewing great kindness to him: he should therefore have recompensed them in the best way. He should have instructed them in the knowledge of the God of Israel, and have told them how willing HE was to become their God; thus, perhaps, he might have converted and saved their souls, and have spread the knowledge of the true God in Babylon; yea, eventually, he might have been instrumental to the salvation of thousands. But he utterly forgot the necessities of their souls, and was offering incense to his own vanity, when he should have been promoting their eternal welfare.]

This was his sin; and God denounced a heavy judgment against him on account of it—

[His riches were all to be taken away by the Chaldeans, his own children were to be made eunuchs in the king of Babylon's palace, and the whole nation to be led into a miserable captivity.]

But, if his offence was great, his humiliation also was remarkable—

[He heard with trembling the judgments which God threatened to execute. *Instead of palliating his sin*, he acknowledged *at once* the justice of the Deity in inflicting such a punishment on account of it: in concert with all his subjects, he implored forgiveness at God's hands; and, having obtained a respite of the sentence, meekly, and even thankfully, acquiesced in the determinations of Heaven‡.]

While we see in him much to shun, and much to imitate, let us shew,

* 2 Kings xx. 11. It is worthy of remark, that the ambassadors were sent *on purpose to inquire into the miracle wrought in the land in making the sun go back ten degrees*. His neglect therefore was the more sinful. 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

† 2 Kings xx. 4, 5.

‡ Isai. xxxix. 8.

II. What grounds there are for similar humiliation amongst us—

Pride is deeply rooted in the heart of fallen man. We are prone to be lifted up on every occasion—

[We are vain of any *natural endowments* of body or mind. The strong displays his strength; the beautiful, her beauty. A penetrating mind, or tenacious memory, are made grounds of self-admiration, and self-preference. Any *acquired distinctions* also become food for our vanity: the man of wealth, of honour, or of power, assumes a consequence from his elevation, and demands from others a homage as his due; the proficient in any art or science courts applause, and delights to have his talents admired. Even the *gifts of grace*, through the depravity of our nature, become occasions of pride: not only an ability to speak or pray with fluency, but even an insight into the corruption of the heart, is often exhibited more for the purpose of attracting admiration than of doing good. Whatever we have that elevates us a little above our fellow-creatures, our proud hearts are fond of displaying it, and pleased with the flattering attentions which it procures for us.]

We indulge the disposition too to the neglect of God's honour, and of the eternal welfare of those around us—

[How many glorious opportunities have we of speaking for God! What grounds of praising him might we find in the sacred records! — — especially the wonders of redeeming love! — — — How many too might we find in our own experience! And what unspeakable benefit might arise to mankind, if we carefully improved these opportunities! But how rarely is our intercourse with each other made subservient to these ends! We for the most part waste our time in flattering attentions and unprofitable civilities, and are as intent on gratifying the vanity of ourselves or others, as if our social converse were capable of no better improvement.]

How much then do we need to imitate Hezekiah's humiliation!

[However innocent we may think such conduct, it is highly criminal in the sight of God; it renders us justly obnoxious to God's heaviest judgments^b. Should we not then humble ourselves before him in dust and ashes? Should not the forbearance he has exercised call forth our devoutest acknowledgments? And should we not adore his goodness even

^b Matt. xii. 36, 37.

if he only delay to execute his threatened vengeance? Let us not attempt to palliate this common, but vile, iniquity, but rather unite in deprecating the wrath we have deserved.]

INFER,

1. How watchful should we be against what are called little sins!

[Hezekiah at first probably intended only to shew civility to his friends; but through inattention to the motions of his heart, he fell into grievous sin, and brought on the whole nation the heaviest judgments. Let us learn then to mark the first risings of sin in our hearts; let us bear in mind how greatly we may offend God by a neglect of our duty: let us remember, too, that God notices and abhors sin in the heart, no less than when it is brought forth into open act; let us guard especially against the workings of pride and vain-glory: let us entreat him to sanctify our inward man¹, and *never to leave us to ourselves for one single moment.*]

2. How great is the efficacy of fervent prayer and intercession!

[The judgment denounced against Hezekiah was to have been speedily inflicted; but he and Judah sought the Lord by humble and fervent prayer, and the Lord deferred the evil till the next generation. Thus will he do also in answer to our prayers. If we turned to him *as a nation*, he would *prolong our national prosperity*, and would *blot out for ever the personal guilt* of every true penitent. Let us then humble ourselves for our abominations both of heart and life; so shall we find God as gracious unto us, as ever he was to his people of old.]

¹ 1 Thess. v. 23.

CCCCXXIX.

THE WEAKNESS AND DEPRAVITY OF MAN.

2 Chron. xxxii. 31. *God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.*

THERE is no character so excellent but there is some blot to be found in it. The most illustrious saints that ever lived, not only betrayed their weakness and sinfulness, but shewed themselves defective in those very graces for which they were most eminent. We must not wonder therefore that Hezekiah, who was in some respects as distinguished a character

as any that either preceded or followed him, became at last a monument of human frailty. It is probable that the peculiar manifestations of the divine favour towards him had excited an undue degree of self-complacency in his mind: God therefore saw fit to try him, and, "in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who had sent unto him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land," (even of the shadow of the sun going backward ten degrees on the sun-dial of Ahaz,) "left him" to the natural workings of his own heart. The consequence was such as might be apprehended; he gave way to pride and vanity, and brought on himself the divine displeasure.

The words which we have read, will naturally lead us to observe, that,

I. Till we are tried, we have very little idea of the evil of our hearts—

[Though we feel no difficulty in admitting that we are sinners, yet we can by no means acknowledge the truth of the representations given of us in the Scriptures. If we were told that we are all by nature haters both of God^a and man^b, we should consider it as a libel upon human nature. When we read the history of the Jews, we are ready to think that they were incomparably more perverse than we should ever be: though if we had been in their situation, there is no reason at all to believe that we should have shewn ourselves in any respect more obedient than they. If we have never fallen into any gross sin, we imagine that our moral conduct has arisen from the superior goodness of our hearts; and we suppose that we have no disposition to those iniquities which are practised by others. We are not aware, that, if we had been subjected to the same trials as others, we should probably have fallen like them. How was Hazael shocked when he was told what enormities he would commit! "Is thy servant a dog, that he should commit this thing^c?" Yet, no sooner was he tried, than he did commit all the enormities that had been foretold. And we, if told, that one of us would become a thief, another an adulterer, and another a murderer, should revolt at the idea, as though we were not capable of such atrocious wickedness: but the more we know of our own hearts, the more we shall

^a Rom. i. 30. and viii. 7.

^b Tit. iii. 3.

^c 2 Kings viii. 12, 13.

be ready to say with David, "My heart sheweth me the wickedness of the ungodly^d," yea, it is an epitome of all the wickedness that is committed upon earth.]

It becomes us to deprecate temptation; since,

II. If left to ourselves, we shall soon give some awful proof of our depravity—

[That any persons are preserved from great enormities is owing to the providence and the grace of God. It has pleased God to encompass them, so that they should be screened from any violent temptation; or else he has endued them with a more abundant measure of his grace, whereby they have been enabled to withstand the tempter. Who that sees how others have fallen, will ascribe his own steadfastness to an arm of flesh? We need only set before us those deplorable monuments of human depravity, David, Solomon, and Peter, and we shall need nothing more to enforce that admonition, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall^e." — — — We perhaps may have maintained a good conduct for a considerable time: but can we not look back to some moment wherein we have been left to follow the bent of our own corrupt hearts? We must be lamentably ignorant of what has passed within us, if we have not long since learned our need to use that prayer, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."^f]

Yet we must not view such proofs of depravity merely as insulated and detached acts: for,

III. One single act of wickedness, if duly considered, will serve as a clew to find out all the iniquity of our hearts—

[God did not design to shew Hezekiah one imperfection only, but "all that was in his heart^g;" and his fall was well calculated to give him this knowledge; for in it he might see, not only his pride and creature-confidence, but his ingratitude for the mercies he had received, his unconcern about the souls of those who came to visit him, his indifference about the honour of his God, and innumerable other evils which were comprehended in his sin^h. Thus, if we will take any one sin

^d Ps. xxxvi. 1. The Prayer-book Translation. See also Mark vii. 21—23. and Jer. xvii. 9.

^e These instances should be opened separately, and at some length.

^f The text may mean, that God left Hezekiah in order that *he*, namely *God*, might know all that was in his heart. See Deut. viii. 2. and xiii. 2, 3. But the sense given to the words seems preferable.

^g If, as is thought, the Babylonians who came to inquire into the miracle of the sun's retrograde motion were worshippers of the sun, what an opportunity had Hezekiah to tell them about Jehovah, who created that sun, and could continue or alter its course at his pleasure!

of our lives, and make use of it as a light to search the dark corners of our hearts, we shall find out a most astonishing mass of wickedness that has hitherto escaped our observation. Take, for instance, any single act of pride, wrath, lewdness, covetousness, or even deadness in prayer, what a scene will it open to our view! what unmindfulness of the divine presence! what unconcern about our own souls! what preferring of carnal ease or worldly vanities to the happiness and glory of heaven! what contempt of that adorable Saviour who shed his blood for us! Alas! alas! we should never come to an end, if we should attempt to declare all the evil which by such a scrutiny we might discover.

This then we would most earnestly recommend as the means of becoming acquainted with our hearts: let us not consider any sin as though it were unconnected with any other; but rather regard every sin as a fruit of an immense tree, or as a little stream flowing from an inexhaustible fountain.]

From this dereliction of Hezekiah, and his fall consequent upon it, we may FURTHER LEARN,

1. Thankfulness to God for the preservation we have experienced—

[None of us have perpetrated one thousandth part of the iniquity which we should have been guilty of, if God had not restrained us by his providence and grace. Let us not then “sacrifice to our own net, or burn incense to our own drag.” Let us rather acknowledge, that by the grace of God we are what we are, and say, “Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise.” And let our dependence be altogether on God, that he who has kept us hitherto, will “preserve us unto his heavenly kingdom.”]

2. Tenderness and compassion towards those who have fallen—

[We are apt to look on a fallen brother with indignation and contempt: but if we considered more attentively our own extreme sinfulness, and how often we should have fallen if outward temptations had concurred sufficiently with our inward dispositions, we shall find less readiness to cast a stone at others: we shall rather see our own picture in their depravity, and extend that compassion to them which in similar circumstances we should desire to meet with at their hands.]

3. Vigilance against the assaults of our great adversary—

[Satan combines in himself the subtlety of a serpent, and the strength of a lion. Well therefore does the Apostle say to

us, "Be sober, be vigilant." If we watch not against his assaults, we, in fact, tempt him to tempt us. Besides, we cannot expect that God should preserve us, if we do not endeavour to preserve ourselves. It will be to little purpose to pray that God will not lead us into temptation, if we presumptuously rush into it of our own accord. Let us then shun the occasions of sin: let us avoid the company, the amusements, the books, yea the very sights that may administer to sin. Let us commit ourselves continually to God's care and protection; and beg of him never to leave us or forsake us. In this way we may hope to experience his unremitting care, and to be "kept by his power through faith unto everlasting salvation."]

CCCCXXX.

MANASSEH'S REPENTANCE.

2 Chron. xxxiii. 10—13. *And the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken. Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him: and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.*

IN histories written by men, our attention is continually directed to second causes; but in the inspired records we see every event traced up to the first Great Cause of all. The rise and fall of empires or of individuals are equally appointed of God for the accomplishment of his own gracious purposes, and for the manifestation of his own glory: and, however casual or contingent any circumstances may appear to be, they are as much under his control, and as certainly fulfil his will, as the stated courses of the heavenly bodies.

In confirmation of this, we need go no further than to the words before us; in which we see,

I. The means by which Manasseh was brought to repentance—

[King Manasseh was perhaps the most wicked of the human race: he was piously educated; yet he totally eradicated from his own mind, and from the breasts of his people, all remembrance of the instructions which his father Hezekiah had given them. He consulted wizards, set up idols even in the house of God itself, made his children pass through fire to Moloch, and filled Jerusalem with the blood of innocents from one end to another. He acted himself, and caused all his people to act, worse than the heathen whom God had cast out for their impieties^a.

To reclaim him God had sent many holy men and prophets to warn and exhort him: but "neither he nor his people would hearken unto them."

At last, determined to overcome him, and to make him an everlasting monument of grace and mercy, God stirred up the king of Assyria against him^b; and caused Manasseh to be vanquished, to be dragged from the thicket where he had secreted himself^c, and to be carried a poor miserable captive in fetters to Babylon.

This prevailed, when all other means had been used in vain. And is it not by these means that God has often subdued, and yet subdues many stout-hearted sinners to himself^d? How many perhaps amongst us must say, "It is good for *me* that I have been afflicted; for before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word^e."]

We are further informed concerning,

II. The way in which his repentance shewed itself—

[Affliction does not necessarily produce repentance. Ahaz trespassed yet more in his distress^f; and the wicked in hell, so far from being softened by their pains, blaspheme their God while they gnaw their tongues for anguish^g. But in him it was effectual, through the grace of God, to bring him to repentance. In his prosperity he was hardened^h, and would not hearⁱ; but "in his affliction he besought the Lord."

Two things more especially are noticed: "he humbled himself greatly;" and "he prayed unto God" earnestly. He called

^a Compare 2 Kings xxi. with the preceding part of this chapter.

^b The king of Babylon, who on account of his having added Assyria to his dominions is called the king of Assyria, is said to have been "brought upon" Manasseh by God himself. And, however he might be actuated by ambition or avarice, he was certainly no more than an instrument by whom God himself acted. Compare Ps. xvii. 13. and Isai. x. 5, 6, 15. with 2 Kings xxiv. 2—4.

^c 1 Sam. xiii. 6.

^d 2 Sam. xxiv. 10, 17.

^e Ps. cxix. 67, 71.

^f 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

^g Rev. xvi. 10.

^h Jer. xxii. 21.

ⁱ Zech. vii. 11, 12. Jer. v. 3.

his ways to remembrance and confessed his guilt, and justified God in all that had come upon him, and in all that ever should come upon him, declaring it was far "less than his iniquities deserved." Then he poured out his soul in fervent prayer, "offering his supplications with strong crying and tears," and wrestling, as it were, with God, to obtain a blessing^k.

Thus will repentance shew itself, wherever it is found: whether we be brought to it by afflictions, or not; yea, whether we have committed such wickedness as Manasseh, or not; these will be the leading features of our experience, if we be truly penitent. The first mark of Paul's repentance was, "Behold, he prayeth!" and what his thoughts of himself were, we may judge from his calling himself "the chief of sinners." Inquire then, beloved Brethren, whether you have ever been brought to humble yourselves before God; and that not a little, but "*greatly?*" Inquire, whether your cries to God are humble, fervent, constant, believing? Consider, "that without repentance you must all perish;" and that this alone will warrant you to conclude your repentance genuine and "saving."]

Its efficacy will appear from,

III. The blessed issue of it—

[Horrible as his iniquities had been, they did not prevent his prayers from coming up with acceptance before God.

Behold the issue of this repentance, first, *in respect to his temporal comfort!* God restored him again to the possession of his kingdom. And it is certain that innumerable judgments would be removed from men, provided the offenders were duly humbled by means of them. We say not indeed that God will always remove the afflictions he has sent, even though we should be ever so much humbled under them; because he may see that the continuance of them is as necessary for our welfare as the first sending of them was: but he will convert them into blessings, and make them subservient to our best interests.

Next, observe the issue of his repentance *in respect to his spiritual advantage.* He neither knew God, nor concerned himself about him in the day of his prosperity: but now he "knew that Jehovah was God." He saw that he was a just and holy God, yea, a God of truth also, who sooner or later would punish sin. He felt that he was a powerful God, "able to abase those who walk in pride," and able also to deliver those whose situation was most desperate. Above all, he knew experimentally that God was a God of infinite mercy and compassion, since he had attended to his prayer, and vouchsafed mercy to his guilty soul. Under this conviction he strove, to

^k His prayer is *repeatedly* noticed, ver. 18, 19. doubtless on account of its fervour.

the latest hour of his life, to remedy all the evil he had ever done, and to glorify his God as much as he had before dishonoured him.

And did ever any one repent, and not find his repentance issue in clearer manifestations of God's love to his soul, and in a richer experience of his power and grace? No: as long as the world stands, "God will comfort all that mourn in Zion, and give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."]

We may LEARN then from hence,

1. The importance of improving ordinances—

[The contempt poured on God's messages was one principal mean of bringing down those judgments on Manasseh. And does not God speak to us by his ministers; and notice how we receive the word? And will not that "word be a savour of death unto us, if it be not a savour of life unto life?" Lay this to heart, all ye who have heard the word in vain: and know that if you slight the message which God sends you by his ministers, he will consider you as pouring contempt upon himself¹.]

2. The use and benefit of afflictions—

[Afflictions, of whatever kind they be, proceed from God; and are intended for our good^m. They have a voice, no less than his ministers; and it is our duty to "hear the rod, and Him that appointed itⁿ." Quarrel not then with any afflictions that may be sent you; but receive them as tokens of God's love, and as messengers of his mercy. What reason had Manasseh to adore his God for the loss of an empire, yea, for cruel captivity, for galling fetters, and a loathsome dungeon! Without them he had been now in chains of darkness and the prison of hell. Thy trials probably are no less necessary for thine eternal welfare. Improve them then for the humbling of thy soul, and for the furtherance of thine everlasting salvation.]

3. The wonderful mercy of our God—

[Who would have thought that such a sinner as Manasseh could ever have obtained mercy? Yet God has pardoned him, and set him forth as a pattern, in order to magnify the exceeding riches of his own grace. Let none then despair. If we were as vile as Manasseh himself, we should go to God with an assurance that he would not cast us out, provided we were truly contrite, and sought for mercy through the blood of Jesus. On the other hand, let us not presume upon this

¹ 1 Thess. iv. 8. ^m Hos. v. 15. Heb. xii. 10. ⁿ Mic. vi. 9.

mercy, and go on in sin under the hope that we shall at last repent and be saved. To-day God calls us; to-morrow the door of mercy may be shut. The Lord grant that we may now repent like Manasseh, and henceforth like him devote ourselves entirely to the service of our God !]

CCCCXXXI.

JOSIAH'S PENITENCE.

2 Chron. xxxiv. 27. *Because thine heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before God, when thou heardest his words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbledst thyself before me, and didst rend thy clothes, and weep before me; I have even heard thee also, saith the Lord.*

IT is scarcely to be conceived how great a benefit has arisen to the Christian cause from the invention of printing. The word of God is that whereby the work of salvation is principally carried on in the souls of men: and the multiplying of copies of the Holy Scriptures, in such a form as to be conveniently portable, and at such a price as to be within the reach of the poor, has tended more than any other thing to keep alive the interests of religion, both in the hearts of individuals, and in the community at large. If we look back to the condition of the Jews in the time of King Josiah, we shall find it truly deplorable. Through the influence of the two preceding kings, the very remembrance of God's law was almost obliterated from the minds of men. Every king was, by God's appointment, to copy it for himself^a: yet not a copy of it was to be seen in the land: so that if God himself had not interposed in his providence to raise up to the Jews a pious king, and by him to bring back the people to some sense of their duty, it is probable that the whole nation would ere long have been immersed in heathen darkness. From the traces of divine knowledge which yet remained by means of the temple and its furniture, and through the operation of God's Spirit

^a Deut. xvii. 18.

on his soul, Josiah was induced to repair the temple, in order to the restoring of God's worship there: and Hilkiah the priest, while executing his orders, found a copy (perhaps the original copy) of the Law, which had been lost amidst the rubbish and ruins of the place. On hearing its contents, Josiah was filled with great anguish, and sent to Huldah the prophetess to know whether the judgments which God had denounced against that apostate nation might by any means be averted: in reply to which he was informed, that the calamities would surely come upon them; but that, in consideration of his penitence, the awful period should not arrive till he himself should be removed to a better world.

From the words before us we shall take occasion to shew,

I. What state of mind the threatenings of God should produce in us—

The conduct of Josiah on this occasion will serve to guide our thoughts.

The threatenings of God should produce in us,

1. A fear of his judgments—

[If men can puff "at God's judgments^b," it is because they have never considered how tremendous they are. Let any man once think seriously of "dwelling with everlasting burnings^c," and we will defy him not to tremble, like Felix^d and Belshazzar^e. Josiah "rent his clothes" with horror, when he heard only of temporal calamities: how much more therefore ought we to fear, when we hear of the miseries that will be endured in "the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone!"]

2. A sorrow of heart for those sins against which his judgments are denounced—

[We are ready to acknowledge, that they who have committed gross sins should mourn for their iniquities. But we should remember that the judgments of God are denounced also against pride, unbelief, impenitence, worldly-mindedness, and numberless other secret sins, which are overlooked, or even

^b Ps. x. 5.

^c Isai. xxxiii. 14. See also Mark ix. 43—48. and Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

^d Acts xxiv. 25.

^e Dan. v. 5, 6.

commended, by the world. For these therefore must we "weep, and humble ourselves before God," yea, and lothe ourselves for them in dust and ashes.]

3. A turning unto God in holy and unreserved obedience—

[This is the true test of sincerity: fears and sorrows are of little avail, if they produce not a thorough change of heart and life. Josiah, from the first moment that he heard the threatenings of God, set himself to accomplish a national reformation, and prosecuted it with zeal to his dying-hour. Thus must we be zealous for our God. We must not pretend to be sorry for our sins, and still continue to live in them; but we must put away the accursed thing, whatever it be, and devote ourselves to God without reserve. It is he only who "confesseth and forsaketh his sins, that shall find mercy^f."]]

To promote such a state of mind amongst you, we proceed to shew,

II. Its acceptableness to God—

The message sent to Josiah sufficiently marks this. God assured him that his prayer was heard in consideration of his penitence. But that such a state of mind is at all times acceptable to God, will more clearly appear, if we consider that,

1. By it all the perfections of God are glorified—

[Repentance is often called "a giving glory to God^g;" and the propriety of this expression is evident: for, exactly as the impenitent man pours contempt on all the divine perfections, setting at nought the power and majesty, the justice and holiness, the love and mercy, the truth and faithfulness of God; so, on the contrary, the penitent brings glory to them all, inasmuch as he acknowledges his obnoxiousness to the divine displeasure, and his ardent desire to obtain an interest in the promises of the Gospel. If then God be concerned for his own glory, he cannot but be pleased with those who, in his appointed way, are labouring to advance it.]

2. To it all the promises of God are made—

[Many are the judgments denounced against the stout-hearted: but in all the inspired volume there is not one word to "break a bruised reed."^h On the contrary, the weary and heavy-laden are invited to come to Christ without any distinction on account of the particular sins with which they are

^f Prov. xxviii. 13.

^g Josh. vii. 19. Jer. xiii. 16.

burthened. God assures the contrite soul, while it is yet trembling at his word, that he will look upon it with peculiar pleasure and complacency^h; and that though a man's conduct may have been such as to fix indelible disgrace upon him in the world, God will never despise him, provided he be of a broken and contrite spiritⁱ. Not even the transient humiliation of Ahab was suffered to pass without some favourable regard^k: much less shall that be overlooked which is sincere and permanent^l. It is indeed not for any merit that there is in our repentance, but for the merits of Jesus Christ, that we shall find acceptance: nevertheless all true penitents, and none other, shall be saved by him.]

INFER,

1. How desirable is it to be well acquainted with the Holy Scriptures!

[The word of God denounces vengeance against many characters that are thought innocent among men: nor will our ignorance of these threatenings avert or delay the execution of them. Let us then study the sacred oracles with an express reference to ourselves, that we may know what God says in them respecting us. Peradventure we may find many passages, which, when applied to our hearts, will give us just occasion to mourn like the pious monarch before us. Better were it far to know the full extent of our guilt, and thereby to be stimulated to repentance, than through ignorance of our state to continue impenitent, till the wrath of God shall come upon us to the uttermost.]

2. How enviable is the condition of a true penitent!

[Every prayer of a real penitent is "heard" of God. Let him "open his mouth ever so wide, God will fill it^m." Let him but plead what the Lord Jesus has done and suffered for him, and God will never cast out his prayer. Surely then there is no man so truly happy as he who "walks humbly with his God." Indeed our Lord himself repeatedly tells us this; "Blessed are the poor in spirit: blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comfortedⁿ."

But it may be thought that such an abject state of mind would be unsuitable to a man of power and opulence. The Jewish monarch however entertained no such vain conceit; he judged it not unbecoming even his high station to feel, yea to manifest also to all around him, a fear of God. Let all of us

^h Isai. lxvi. 2.

ⁱ Ps. li. 17.

^k 1 Kings xxi. 29.

^l Ps. xxxiv. 18.

^m Isai. lv. 7.

ⁿ Matt. v. 3, 4.

then, the high as well as the low, the spiritual as well as the profane, seek to have "a tender heart." Let us beg of God "to take away from us the heart of stone, and to give us hearts of flesh," well knowing, that the more exquisite our sensibility is with respect to sin, the more pleasing will be our state before God.]

CCCCXXXII.

FORBEARANCE OF GOD BROUGHT TO A CLOSE.

2 Chron. xxxvi. 15, 16. *And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.*

IN speaking of the divine perfections, it is common to represent them all as infinite, because they do not admit of any increase: but perhaps it would be more correct to speak of them as limited, because they all so limit each other as to produce one harmonious agency in all their operations; every perfection being exercised so far, and so far only, as is consistent with the glory of the whole Deity. Justice, for instance, never exerts itself to the disparagement of mercy; nor does mercy ever triumph over the rights of justice: so neither does patience interpose for the arresting of judgment, any longer than consists with the claims of holiness: as soon as ever its protracted influence would reflect dishonour on God as the Moral Governor of the universe, it recedes, and leaves the sword of vengeance to execute its heavenly commission. The truth of this statement fully appears from the words before us; from which we are naturally led to notice,

I. God's patience exercised—

It was exercised to a most astonishing degree towards his people of old—

[The Scripture frequently speaks of God, not only as sending messengers to his people, but as "rising early" and sending them. This intimates, that as soon as ever they went

astray, he commissioned his servants to reclaim them; yea, many hundred years before the final execution of his judgments upon them, he forewarned them how he would proceed, and cautioned them against driving him to such extremities^a——— When these warnings were disregarded, he sent them prophets, to bring these things to their remembrance, and to plead with them in his name. Sometimes he raised up prophets for particular occasions; at other times he continued them for many years in their office, in order by any means to turn the people from their sins. Full of "compassion towards his people," and averse to forsake the land which he had given them for a "dwelling-place," he bore with all their frowardness and perverseness; "many a time turning away his anger," when he might justly have broken forth against them, and made them monuments of his everlasting indignation^b.

But how did they requite his tender mercies? "They mocked his messengers (we are told), and despised his words, and misused his prophets." Even against Moses himself did their resentment frequently burn, insomuch that on one occasion they were ready to stone him^c. Their prophets in every successive age were treated with all manner of indignities, menaced, imprisoned, martyred, according as the wrath of their rulers was permitted to prevail. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" said St. Stephen^d; and our blessed Lord, to comfort his disciples under the trials which they would meet with, reminded them, that "so had the prophets been persecuted, who were before them^e."]]

In like manner is it exercised in reference to us——

[God is yet sending his ambassadors to us, not merely to reprove and warn, or to encourage us with a hope of temporal rewards, as he did to the Jews, but to offer us redemption through the blood of his dear Son, and to beseech us to accept of reconciliation with him^f——— And such is his "compassion towards us," that he cannot endure the thought of giving us up, as long as a hope remains of converting us to himself^g———

And what return do we make to God? Do we not act precisely as the Jews before us did? There is no faithful messenger that addresses us in Jehovah's name, but we call him an enthusiast: however temperate and kind, and reasonable his exhortations may be^h, we mock and deride him as

^a Lev. xxvi. 14—39. and Deut. xxviii. 15—68.

^b Ps. lxxviii. 38. and cvi. 13—48.

^c Exod. xvii. 4.

^d Acts vii. 52.

^e Matt. v. 12.

^f 2 Cor. v. 18—20.

^g Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Jer. xiii. 27. Hos. xi. 8.

^h See particularly the temperate message sent by Hezekiah, 2 Chron. xxx. 6—10.

"a babbler¹," "a deceiver^k," and "a fellow that ought not to be tolerated^l." Our blessed Lord himself, who "spake as never man spake," was accounted a madman and a demoniac^m; and every faithful servant of God, from his day even to the present hour, has been made an object, though not of equal, yet certainly of similar, reproach. One would suppose that men, with the sacred volume in their hands, seeing how the prophets and Apostles were all treated, would avoid treading in the steps of former persecutors: but the enmity of the human heart against God is the same as ever; and the messages of God are therefore treated with the same contempt as ever. If there be any difference as to the mode in which that enmity betrays itself, it is owing to the excellence of our laws, and not to any superiority in us above the Jews. Our dispositions are the same as theirs, and our abuse of God's tender mercies is the same.]

In the sequel of our text we see,

II. God's patience exhausted—

He was at last constrained to execute upon them his threatened vengeance—

[After bearing with their frowardness many hundred years, his wrath against them was kindled, and he gave them up into the hands of their enemiesⁿ. Every effort for their preservation had been tried in vain, and "no remedy now remained:" the people therefore were sent into captivity; and both their city and temple were destroyed.]

Thus also will he do with respect to us—

[If we go on incessantly "grieving the Holy Spirit," we shall at last "quench" his sacred motions^o. There is a time beyond which God will bear with us no longer^p. There is a day of grace wherein he will be found^q; an accepted time in which salvation may be secured by us^r. But there is a time when he will say, "Let them alone^s;" "Let their eyes be blinded and their hearts be hardened^t:" "I am weary with repenting^u:" and now, "though they cry I will not hear, though they make many prayers I will not regard them^x."

Doubtless if a person were truly penitent, he would be

¹ Acts xvii. 18. Ezek. xx. 40. ^k John vii. 12.

^l Acts xxii. 22. and xxiv. 5. ^m John x. 20.

ⁿ ver. 17—21.

^p Matt. xxiii. 37, 38.

^q 2 Cor. vi. 2. Isai. lv. 6.

^r Acts xxviii. 25—27.

^s Prov. i. 24—31.

^o Eph. iv. 30. 1 Thess. v. 19.

^q Luke xix. 41—44.

^r Hos. iv. 17.

^u Jer. xv. 6.

heard and accepted at the last hour: but it is God alone who can give repentance: and, if we continue obstinately to resist his calls, he will cease to strive with us⁷, and will give us over to final impenitence⁸. This he has done in unnumbered instances; and this he warns us to expect at his hands: "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy⁹."]

ADDRESS—

[God speaks to men by his word and ministers at this day, as truly as ever he did either by Prophets or Apostles: and our word, as far as it is agreeable to the Scriptures of Truth, is to be "received, not as the word of man, but of God^b:" and, if any man "despiseth it, he despiseth not man, but God^c." Happy would it be if this matter were duly considered: for certainly there are many, of a proud and contemptuous spirit, who instead of "trembling at the word," as they ought^d, and "humbling themselves before the ministers" of Jehovah^e, make light of all they hear^f, and turn it to derision^g. But to such God says, "Be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong^h." There is great danger lest they "be holden with the cords of their own sinsⁱ," and be given up to their own delusions^k.

On the other hand, let not any imagine that an attachment to faithful ministers, or a love to the ordinances as dispensed by them, will necessarily prove us to be in a state of acceptance with God: for Ezekiel's hearers were delighted with his discourses, whilst yet they were by no means conformed to the precepts delivered by him^l. Inquire then whether you be really obedient to the Gospel, receiving Christ as the gift of God to your souls, relying on him as your only hope, rejoicing in him as your all-sufficient Saviour, and devoting yourselves to him in all holy obedience. The tree must be judged of by its fruits alone. If your fruits be not yet such as might be wished, apply the "remedy:" go to Christ for the remission of your sins, and seek from him the gift of his Holy Spirit: then shall the Gospel have its due effect, and be "the power of God to the salvation of your souls."]

⁷ Gen. vi. 3.

⁸ Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12.

⁹ Prov. xxix. 1.

^b 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^c 1 Thess. iv. 8.

^d Isai. lxvi. 2.

^e ver. 12.

^f Matt. xxii. 5.

^g Jer. xx. 7, 8.

^h Isai. xxviii. 22.

ⁱ Prov. v. 22.

^k Isai. lxvi. 4. 2 Thess. ii. 10—12.

^l Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

E Z R A.

CCCCXXXIII.

THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

Ezra iii. 11—13. *All the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.*

TO put a fanciful interpretation on any part of God's blessed word is highly inexpedient; and to found a doctrine upon any such interpretation would be injudicious in the extreme. But certain it is, that there are many explanations given us by the Apostles, which we should in no wise have admitted, if given by uninspired men; such as the termination of the Levitical priesthood, as deduced from Abraham's giving to Melchizedec a tenth of the spoils which he had taken; and the reservation of God's inheritance to regenerate persons only, as deduced from Abraham's repudiation of Hagar and her son Ishmael. Where these things are explained by the inspired writers, we may follow without fear: but in any interpretations of our own, the utmost diffidence becomes us. These observations I make, lest, in the passage before us, I should be misunderstood as intimating that the construction put upon it was really designed by the event itself. I am far from intending

to assert that. I merely bring forth the subject as both curious in itself, and calculated to convey important instruction to our minds, if judiciously and temperately considered. That an exuberance of joy and of sorrow should be excited at once by the same event, is undoubtedly a curious fact: and it will be profitable to shew you,

I. What there was at that time to call forth such strong and widely different emotions—

The Jews, after their return from Babylon, had just laid the foundation of the second temple: and this was,

1. To some an occasion of exalted joy—

[It was not the mere circumstance that a magnificent building was about to be raised, but the thought of the use to which that building was to be appropriated, that proved to them such a source of joy. The erection of it was justly regarded by them as *a restoration of God's favour to them*, after the heavy judgments which he had inflicted on them during their captivity in Babylon. In this light they had been taught to consider their return to their native land; and the very song which they now sang, had, at the commencement of their captivity, been provided for them by the Prophet Jeremiah, as proper to be sung on that occasion^a — — — This event opened to them *a prospect of again worshipping Jehovah according to all the forms prescribed to them by the Mosaic ritual*. In reference to this, also, the same song had been provided for them by David; in singing which they could not but “make a joyful noise unto the Lord^b” — — — Nor could they fail to view it *as tending to advance the honour of their God*; in which view pre-eminently it must of necessity fill them with most exalted joy. As the bringing up of the ark to Mount Zion, so this event also called for songs and acclamations from every creature under heaven: “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth; make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills be joyful together before the Lord: for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity^c.”

^a Cite Jer. xxxiii. 10, 11. as compared with the words immediately preceding the text.

^b Cite also Ps. c. 1—5. in the same view.

^c Compare 1 Chron. xvi. 8—10, 31—34. with Ps. xcvi. 1—9.

I think, with such views of the event before them, the people could not but shout for joy; and “if they had been silent, the very stones would have cried out against them.”]

2. To others, an occasion of the deepest sorrow—

[Commentators have condemned this sorrow, as expressive of discontent; and as shewing, that the persons so affected did in reality betray an ungrateful spirit, and “despise the day of small things⁴.” But I am far from thinking such an interpretation of their conduct just. The persons who manifested such pungent grief were “the priests, and Levites, and the chief of the fathers who were ancient men, that had seen the former temple.” It is true, they wept, because they well knew how infinitely this structure must fall below the former in point of magnificence. Whether it was of smaller dimensions than the former, we do not know: but as, of course, it could not be so splendidly furnished as the former temple was, so, of necessity, it must want many things which constituted the glory of that edifice, and could never be replaced. The Shechinah, the bright cloud, the emblem of the Deity himself, was for ever removed. The ark was lost, and the copy of the Law which had been preserved in it. The Urim and Thummim too, by which God had been wont to communicate to his people the knowledge of his will, was irrecoverably gone; and the fire which had descended from heaven was extinct, so that they must henceforth use in all their sacrifices nothing but common fire. And what but their sins had brought upon them all these calamities? Would it have been right, then, in these persons to lose all recollection of their former mercies, and of the sins through which they had been bereaved of them; and to be so transported with their present blessings as not to bewail their former iniquities? No: I think that the mixture of feeling was precisely such as the occasion called for: and if there appeared a preponderance on the side of grief, it was only such as the glorified saints in heaven are expressing continually in the very presence of their God; for whilst singing, with all their powers, “Salvation to God and to the Lamb,” they are all prostrate on their faces with self-abasing shame, and casting their crowns down before the throne, from a conscious unworthiness of the honour conferred upon them.

But I think that the Prophet Ezekiel, and I may add too the experience of all the most eminent saints that ever lived, will put this matter in its true point of view. By Ezekiel, God says, “I will remember my covenant with thee, and will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant, that thou mayest *remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any*

⁴ Zech. iv. 10.

more because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God*." And Job, Isaiah, Paul, yea, every real saint, in proportion as he is humbled before God, evinces precisely the feeling which was here so strongly marked: they lothe themselves in proportion as they are favoured and honoured by their God†.]

That this subject is not uninteresting to *us*, will appear, whilst I shew,

II. How far similar emotions become us at the present day—

Certainly there is at this time great occasion for joy—

[We are not, indeed, constructing a material temple for the Lord: but the whole nation is engaged in endeavours to erect a spiritual temple to him throughout the world. Never was there a period, since the apostolic age, when the exertions were so general, so diversified, so diffusive. To spread the blessed word of God, and to send to every nation under heaven those who shall impart the knowledge of it to the unenlightened, whether of Jews or Gentiles, seems at this time the one great labour of all who love and fear God. And is this no ground of joy? — — But, to come home more nearly to ourselves: Is there no reason to rejoice in what, we trust, is going on amongst us? If the Gospel be "glad tidings of great joy unto all people," is it no cause for joy that it is brought to our ears; and that it is effectual amongst us, as it has been throughout the whole world, to convert men to God, and to save many souls alive?

But, not to dwell on matters of general concern, let us bring it home to our own business and bosoms: Are there not amongst you, who hear me this day, some at least who have been "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God?" Yes, I trust, there are here present some at least, who, having been taken from the quarry by the great Master Builder, are now "as lively stones built up a spiritual house," to be "the habitation of God, through the Spirit," for ever and ever. Speak I then too much, if I say, that not only those individuals themselves, but all who are interested in their welfare, have reason to burst forth into songs of praise, as loud and fervent as those that were uttered on the occasion which we have been considering? If even the very angels before the throne of God are not so occupied with contemplating the divine glory, but that they have derived a great

* Ezek. xvi. 60—63.

† Job xl. 3, 4. Isai. vi. 5. 1 Tim. i. 12, 13.

accession to their joy from their views of every individual amongst you that is truly converted to God, surely *we*, who are all looking for the same salvation, and hoping to be partakers of it, have reason to rejoice.]

Yet is there amongst us abundant occasion for grief also—

[The persons whose anguish of heart forced from them such bitter lamentations, were those who remembered the former temple, which had far exceeded in glory every edifice which the world had ever seen. Now, if we suppose the Apostle Paul, who witnessed the state of God's Church in its primitive and purest age; if we suppose him, I say, to come down in the midst of *us*, what would be his feelings at the present hour? That he would not "despise the day of small things," or be indifferent about the salvation of ever so few, we are well assured: but what would he say to the state of this parish, this town and neighbourhood, or of the individuals who are most looked up to in the midst of us as professing and adorning the faith of Christ? Would his joy be unmingled with sorrow? Would he, recollecting what pure Christianity is, and what the preached Gospel produced in his day, and what advantages we have enjoyed; would he, I say, be satisfied with what he saw? Would he not rather burst out into floods of tears? yea, much as many are rejoicing at what exists amongst us, would not his lamentations equal in loudness and intensity the joys that are expressed by others in our behalf? I think that no one who knows what the Apostle *was*, and what he himself *is*, can doubt of this. On the occasion referred to in my text, the noise of the joy and of the sorrow could not be distinguished from each other, by reason of the intensity of both: and I am well persuaded, that, if an assembly of primitive saints were at this moment blended with us, they would equal in their wailings the joys which any of us feel, or which others can feel in our behalf. It was with "weeping" that St. Paul contemplated many of the Philippian converts^g: and for many of the Galatian Church he "agonized as in the pangs of childbirth, till Christ should be more perfectly formed in them^h." And was this from a *want* of charity, or from a contempt of piety in its lower stages of existence? No; but from *love*, and from a desire that God should be honoured to the uttermost, wherever his Gospel came, and wherever its blessings were experienced in the soul.]

SEE, then,

^g Phil. iii. 18.

^h Gal. iv. 19.

1. What, above all things, should interest our souls—

[I say not that any one should be indifferent about the things relating to this present world: but I say, that the interests of religion in general, and in our own souls in particular, ought to swallow up, as it were, every other concern. As the rebuilding of the temple filled the minds of those at that time engaged in it, so nothing under heaven should transport us with joy like the establishment of Christ's kingdom in the world and in the soul. On the other hand, nothing should produce in us such acute sensations of grief, as a consciousness that God is not glorified in the midst of us as he ought to be. Verily, it is a shame to the Christian world, that they feel so little on these subjects, whilst every vanity of time and sense is sufficient to excite in them the strongest emotions — — — But, Beloved, learn, I pray you, what ought to be the state of your minds in relation to the cause of God; and never cease to cry unto God, till you have obtained grace to serve him as it becomes those who have received mercy at his hands.]

2. What use we should make of our knowledge and experience—

[Many would think that the unmixed joy of the younger classes was more becoming than the grief of the elder. But if, as I suppose, the cries of the elder were a mixture of joy and sorrow arising from a more enlarged view of the whole matter, a decided preference must be given to their feelings above those of their younger brethren. It is not the fruit which exhibits the brightest colours that will prove the most grateful to the taste, but that which, under the influence of warmer suns, has acquired somewhat of a darker and more mellowed tint. So, in like manner, it is not so much an unqualified effusion of joy that is pleasing to the Most High, as that which is moderated with shame, and tempered with contrition. In truth, as long as we are in this world, we must have occasion for shame and sorrow: it will be time enough to lay them aside, when we are got within the portals of heaven. *There* our happiness will be without alloy; as the prophet says: "We shall have gladness and joy; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Cultivate, then, my Brethren, this depth of feeling, this tenderness of spirit, this humility of mind. Never forget your great and multiplied transgressions: but "walk softly before your God" in the remembrance of them; contented to "sow in tears, that you may reap in joy;" and to "humble yourselves now, that you may be exalted in due time."]

CCCCXXXIV.

SERMON ON THE KING'S ACCESSION.

Ezra vi. 10. *Offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king^a.*

ON the last occasion of our assembling in this place, we were called to pay a respectful tribute to the memory of our late beloved and revered sovereign, whose mortal remains were then committed to the tomb. The vision which the Apostle John beheld of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, in which Jehovah, with all his hosts and angels, vouchsafes to dwell, was then submitted to your attention, as offering peculiar consolation to us under the loss we have sustained: for there "the spirits of the just are made perfect," and enter into the complete fruition of that glory, which here they apprehended only by the weak and imperfect grasp of faith. Of such as shall be admitted to those blissful mansions, it is said, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." That our sorrows in this vale of tears might be alleviated, and our consolation in the prospect of that happy state be the more abundant, Jehovah, having said, "Behold, I make all things new," added, "Write; for *these words are true and faithful*:" and the truth of them shall be experienced by every saint in due season. Then the same Almighty Being yet further added, "IT IS DONE^b." This very blessedness *is already experienced* by millions, who, in successive ages and generations, have been gathered to their fathers, and liberated from the pains and troubles of this mortal life; millions, who "have come out of great tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, are already before the throne of God, and

^a This Sermon was preached on the occasion of the Accession of King George the Fourth, 1820.

^b Rev. xxi. 1—6.

serve him day and night in his temple; and neither hunger any more, nor thirst any more, neither does the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne feeds them, and leads them to living fountains of waters: and God has wiped away all tears from their eyes^c.”

Here our minds were irresistibly led to contemplate the state of our departed sovereign. “IT IS DONE;” yes, “IT IS DONE;” to *his unspeakable joy*, and to *the comfort* of every reflecting mind. Embittered as his life has been by great and heavy trials, by the loss of a considerable portion of his empire, by the subjugation of Europe to the dominion of an insatiable and ruthless tyrant, and by having to contend for the very existence of his kingdom as an independent state; having also, during the latter years of his life, been visited with the heaviest afflictions of which our frail nature is susceptible,—with the loss of vision, not only corporeal, but mental; I say, embittered as his life has been, how sweet the thought, that now “all former things are passed away—that pain and sorrow are known by him no more—that all tears are for ever wiped away from his eyes”—that, at the instant of his departure hence, “joy and gladness came forth” to welcome him as his inseparable attendants—and “sorrow and sighing,” which had followed him so closely during his long and eventful life, “fled away for ever.” Verily this thought may well reconcile us to a dispensation, which, according to the course of nature, was to be expected soon, and which, if it have bereaved us, has so greatly benefited and enriched him^d.

It seems proper now that our attention should be turned to his son and successor, our present most gracious sovereign; and that we should contemplate the duties which his accession to the throne imperiously calls for at our hands. With this view I have selected the passage before us, in which King Darius

^c Rev. vii. 14—17.

^d Isai. xxxv. 10. This exordium may easily be modified, according to existing circumstances.

expresses his wish that the Jews, who were then under his dominion, and whom he was greatly favouring, would serve their God with all fidelity, and unite their supplications "for him, and for his sons."

I propose to consider the words before us in a two-fold point of view :

I. *As the desire of a heathen prince ; and,*

II. *As the duty of a Christian people.*

I. Let us consider them as *the desire of a heathen prince*—

If the occasion on which the words were spoken be duly considered, it will appear that the desire expressed in them was a *just and reasonable* desire, and at the same time a *wise and politic* desire.

True, it was a *just and reasonable* desire ; as the history will clearly shew. The Jews, by the permission of Cyrus, had begun to rebuild their temple, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had destroyed. But, when Artaxerxes had succeeded to the throne of Persia, the Samaritans, filled with envy at the progress which the Jews made in the erection of their city and temple, sent to him, to apprise him of the danger that would ensue to his government, if they should be permitted to proceed with their building. Upon this, Artaxerxes commanded that the work should be stopped, till further orders should be issued by him for the prosecution of it. This so discouraged the Jews, that they abandoned the public works for many years, and attended only to their own personal accommodations. But at last, after Darius had succeeded to the throne of Persia, the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah stirred up the Jews to resume the work ; and, having succeeded in exciting among the people a holy zeal to prosecute it with vigour, they had the joy of beholding it advance with great rapidity. But, behold, the enemies of Judah and Benjamin, being again filled with envy, applied to the governors whom Darius had placed over them, to execute and enforce the orders

of the late king Artaxerxes, and to put an entire stop to the building. But these governors, being more candid than those to whom the complaint had been before made, suffered the Jews to state their own case, and transmitted it faithfully to Darius, with a request for instructions how to act. Upon this, Darius consulted the records of his kingdom; and, finding their representations just, he issued a decree, that no obstacle should any more be put in their way; that the most liberal aid should be afforded them, out of his revenues, for the establishment and support of the temple worship; and that, if any one in future should attempt to reverse this decree, his house should be pulled down, and the timbers of it be erected as a gallows, whereon he should suffer death*.

Now, consider the obligations which this benevolent monarch was conferring on the Jews; and then say, Whether the desire which he expressed was not *just and reasonable*. He had ordered, that "whatever they had need of, young bullocks and rams and lambs, for the burnt-offerings of the God of heaven, together with wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which were at Jerusalem, should be given them, day by day, without fail." Was it not reasonable that he should expect these things to be applied to their destined use, and that, when he was shewing such a paternal regard for the welfare of their nation, he should be remembered by them in their devotions, and have an interest in their prayers? Surely, this was the least return which they could render to him for his extreme kindness. And, if he, who was a heathen, had such confidence in Jehovah, as to believe that there was efficacy in prayers addressed to him, and to desire that intercessions should be offered to him in his behalf, it became them, who knew that Jehovah was a prayer-hearing God, to be very urgent with him in their supplications, and to entreat, day and night, that he would recompense

* ver. 11, 12.

into the king's bosom all the favours which he had so liberally heaped upon them.

But we have said, that the desire expressed in our text was also a *wise and politic* desire. Religion and loyalty are inseparable^f. It cannot be, that a man who truly fears God should fail essentially in honouring the king. The godly ever have been, and ever must be, "the quiet in the land." It is not possible for them to be entering into cabals, and stirring up a spirit of disaffection to the throne. On the other hand, a man who has no fear of God before his eyes has no principle sufficiently strong to keep him faithful to his king, if he be drawn either by interest or inclination to oppose him. The probability is, that the very same principle which leads him to cast off the yoke of God will impel him to resist and overthrow all human authority also, as far as his own safety will admit of it. The throne and the altar will for the most part stand or fall together, as in the affections, so also in the efforts and exertions of mankind. Hence, then, it was wise in Darius, though a heathen prince, to encourage piety amongst the Jews.

Nor was he less politic in desiring a remembrance in their prayers. Pray for a man; and hate him, if you can. There may be faults in the monarch, and errors in his government: but the man who prays devoutly and constantly for him will cast a veil over the one, and use none but constitutional methods of correcting and remedying the other. Intercession will induce a habit of mind friendly to the person for whom it is offered, and, if offered in sincerity by a whole nation, would prove a bulwark around the

^f It is possible that a pious man may be misguided, as was doubtless the case with many in the days of Charles the First: but their error must not be imputed to religion: for, if it was the duty of Christians to submit to, and to pray for, such a tyrant as Nero, the point is determined at once. "The powers that be, are ordained of God; and are to be obeyed, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." To inquire whether any, or what, circumstances would justify a departure from this rule, is no part of the author's design: it is ground which a minister of the Prince of Peace is not called to occupy.

throne, stronger than all the fleets and armies that could be raised for its defence.

II. But let us pass on to the second head of our Discourse; in which we proposed to consider the text as declaring to us also, *the duty of a Christian people.*

Our first duty, beyond all doubt, is to *our heavenly King*: our next is, to *the monarch whom, in his providence, he has placed over us*:—we must first “Fear God,” and then “Honour the King.”

In the service of our heavenly King, “the offering of sacrifices to him of a sweet savour” may well be considered as comprehending our duty to him; whether *as sinners*, who stand in need of his mercy, or *as saints*, who desire to glorify his name. The Jewish sacrifices, which were offered from day to day, were presented as an atonement for the sins of the people: and they prefigured that “Lamb of God, which, in his eternal purpose, was slain from the foundation of the world.” These *we* are not required to bring; because that adorable Saviour, in whom all the types and shadows of the Mosaic Law were to be fulfilled, is come; even Jesus, of whom it is said, “He loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering, and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour^s.” This sacrifice we must ever bring before the God of heaven and earth. We must never presume to come into his presence without it. We must lay our hands on the head of that blessed victim, and transfer to him all our guilt, and expect forgiveness solely through his atoning blood. To this the whole Scriptures direct us, as the sure and only means of acceptance with God. Consult the Law and the Prophets; and they will all point to Jesus, as “the way, the truth, and the life^h.” The Apostles also declare, that “*his* is the only name whereby any man can be savedⁱ.” the voice of all, without exception, is the same as that of this heathen prince: “Offer sacrifices to the God of heaven.”

^s Eph. v. 2. ^h John xiv. 6. Rom. iii. 21, 22. ⁱ Acts iv. 12.

But there are other sacrifices also, which, *as saints*, we are to offer, and which have a sweet savour before God. Our whole person, body, soul, and spirit, is to be presented to the Lord, as the Apostle tells us: "I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service^k." And, if only we come to God through Christ, there is not a service which we can render to him which shall not come up with acceptance before him, as a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour. Such are our alms^l; such our prayers^m; such our very sighsⁿ; such is our every service, of whatever kind^o.

And do not imagine that your attention to this duty is unimportant as it respects the welfare of the state. There is a far closer connexion between national piety and national prosperity than men generally imagine. Hear, I pray you, the admonition given us in the very next chapter: *Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king^p?*

Let then a heathen prince, my Brethren, teach and admonish you: and forget not henceforth your indispensable duty, to "offer sacrifices of a sweet savour unto the God of heaven."

To this must be added your duty to your earthly prince, to be instant in prayer to God on his behalf.

This is your duty: for the Apostle says, "I exhort that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority: for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour^q."

And let me add, *It is your interest also*: for the welfare of every individual in the nation is bound up in the welfare of the king. If God, in his mercy, direct his counsels, and prosper his endeavours, the whole empire will reap the benefit; whilst, on the

^k Rom. xii. 1.

^l Heb. xiii. 16.

^m Ps. cvii. 22.

ⁿ Ps. li. 17.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 5.

^p Ezra vii. 23.

^q 1 Tim. ii. 1—3.

other hand, if God were to give him up to infatuated counsels, or to blast his best endeavours, the whole body politic would suffer, from the greatest to the least. As every member of the human frame participates in the sufferings of the head, so should we all, without exception, have reason to deplore any evil which befel him on whom the destinies of the nation so essentially depend.

But to the performance of this duty *we have an especial call* at this time[†]. The illness with which his Majesty has been visited, and from which he is at this time scarcely recovered, speaks loudly to us all, and should make us extremely urgent with God in his behalf, that his valuable life may be spared to us. Call to mind how suddenly one of his royal house, in the very prime of life, and in the utmost vigour of manhood, has been snatched away^{*}; and then say, whether we have not reason to unite in unwearied supplications to the God of heaven, to restore his health, and to preserve to us a life so justly dear, so transcendently important. But further, reflect upon the state of the nation at this time: what a spirit of insubordination and impiety has prevailed, and would yet shew itself in the same daring attitude that it has already assumed, if the firmness of our king, and the wisdom of the legislature, had not repressed it. We must not imagine that the rebellious disposition of those miscreants, who, for so long a time, and to so awful a degree, have agitated the nation, is changed: no: it is only waiting for an opportunity to burst forth; and, like water that has been dammed up, it would quickly deluge the whole kingdom, if only it could bear down the barriers with which its progress has been stopped. See what this same spirit of impiety and of anarchy accomplished in a neighbouring kingdom, and, if it had not been withstood by the wisdom and firmness of

[†] The remainder of this head can, of course, apply only to the particular occasion: but every succeeding period will supply appropriate topics to substitute in its place.

^{*} The Duke of Kent.

our late revered monarch, would have accomplished here also! See what an horrible deed this demoniacal spirit has just perpetrated in France, in order to effect the extirpation of the royal family there![†] And is not the same spirit alive in this country? Look back to the former reign: no less than three times was the life of our late gracious sovereign attempted. Yea, and our present sovereign too:—his prime minister has been assassinated; the life of another of his ministers has been attempted[‡]; the lives of many of them have been menaced; and his own life also has been sought by the hands of an assassin. Scarcely have a few weeks elapsed, since several, who were engaged in executing the laws, were either murdered, or delivered, as it were by miracle, out of the murderers' hands: and apologies have been made by those who would direct the public mind, in extenuation of these enormities. Tell me, Is there not a call on the whole people of the land to "pray for the life of the king[§]?"

But I must add yet further;—*We have a special obligation* to pray for him. Consider the obligations which we owe to his august family! What liberty, both civil and religious, have we enjoyed, since the house of Brunswick came to the throne! No person whatever is molested, if he molest not others. But why speak I of obligations to *the family* of our sovereign? Think what we owe to the sovereign himself, who, under God, has brought us through all the difficulties and dangers of the late conflict, and placed this nation on a pinnacle of glory, which no

[†] The murder of the Duc de Berri.

[‡] If this and the foregoing instance be supposed to have occurred on private, rather than public, grounds, still they shew the spirit that has existed, and yet exists, in the nation; which is the point here chiefly to be noticed.

[§] Little did the author think, when he sent this to the press, what weight all his observations were speedily to derive from the horrible conspiracy just brought to light. (The Cato-street conspiracy.) Surely there will not be found many in the land, who will not bless and admire that gracious God, who has so mercifully interposed to defeat it!

human being could have ventured, a few years ago, to anticipate, or even think of! See, too, the manner in which he has proceeded in suppressing the atrocities which, from the excess of our liberties, licentious blasphemers and agitators have been able to effect! Not one atom more of restraint has he imposed than was necessary for the occasion: so far has he been from wishing to stretch either his own prerogative or the rigour of the law beyond what necessity required, that there is scarcely a person in the whole nation that is not impressed with the wisdom, and moderation, and equity of the enactments which his servants have proposed and his authority has sanctioned. I say, call these things to remembrance; and then ask yourselves, Whether the praying for the life of such a king be not the least that we can do to requite the benefits that we have received from him? Surely you need not to be instructed by a heathen: you need not Darius to inform you of your duty.—To all of you then, as Christians, I would say, “Offer sacrifices of sweet savour unto the God of heaven, and *pray for the life of the king.*”

In my text it is said, “Pray for the life of the king and *his sons.*” Would to God I could urge upon you your duty to the same extent; or that I could say, Pray for the king and for *his daughter!* But it has pleased God, in his mysterious providence, to deprive us of *her*, who was the hope and joy of the whole nation; and of her infant offspring too, to whom we fondly looked as to the future sovereign of these realms. Still does the nation mourn, and for many years will continue to mourn, that overwhelming bereavement. In a moment when every heart was ready to leap for joy, and every tongue to utter the language of congratulation and thankfulness, the sad tidings came, and plunged the whole nation in an abyss of woe. It is not permitted us, therefore, any longer to pray for *her*. But this should interest us the more in behalf of all the royal family, for whom our prayers should ascend with unceasing earnestness,

that God may bless them in all their concerns, both temporal and spiritual, and render them blessings, both by their influence and example, to this whole nation.

To conclude.—Let us, from the example of this heathen prince, learn *how to employ our influence*:—He was the mightiest monarch that day upon the face of the earth: and there were in his dominions a poor and despised people, who were zealous for the honour of their God, but whose zeal in the cause of religion was misrepresented, and made a subject of complaint. But the king, so far from wishing to interfere with them in the conscientious discharge of their duty, gave them every possible encouragement, as well by pecuniary aid as by his effectual protection; thus shewing himself the father of his people, and the patron of all that was good. In like manner, whether our influence have a wider range, or be contracted within a narrower sphere, let us use it for “the God of heaven:” let us employ it to protect the oppressed, to encourage piety, and to maintain the honour of God in the world.

On the other hand, let us learn also *how to improve the privileges we enjoy*.—No doubt the Jews felt their obligations to Darius, and acknowledged with gratitude the hand of God, who had caused them to find favour in his sight. No doubt, also, the pious among them, at least, earnestly poured forth to God their supplications in behalf of their gracious benefactor. Let *us* then, who enjoy such privileges, not merely through the favour of our monarch, but through the established constitution of the realm; let *us*, I say, abound in praises to our heavenly Benefactor, in affectionate loyalty to our earthly king, and in every work, whereby God may be glorified, and the welfare of our fellow-creatures may be advanced.

CCCCXXXV.

THE SUBSERVIENCY OF A FAITHFUL MINISTRY TO THE
ERECTION OF GOD'S SPIRITUAL TEMPLE.

Ezra vi. 14. *And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo.*

THE purposes of God, whatever difficulties may seem to obstruct the execution of them, are all accomplished in due season. The deliverance of his people from Babylon, and the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem, though in themselves the most improbable events, were effected with a facility the most surprising. The heart of Cyrus was moved to give the orders that were requisite; and though the constructing of the temple was retarded by unforeseen obstacles, yet afterwards, through the exhortations of the Prophets Haggai and Zechariah, that laborious work was finished in the space of four years.

We shall offer a few remarks upon,

I. The building of the temple through the instrumentality of the fore-mentioned prophets.

Many difficulties obstructed the progress of the work—

[Scarcely was the foundation laid, before an attempt was made to impede the work through *the hypocrisy of pretended friends*. The Samaritans offered to co-operate with the Jews in raising the intended fabric: but their design was to frustrate, rather than promote, the completion of it. And though this appears at first sight to be a strange mode of shewing hostility, yet it is indeed most common, both in political contests, and in the concerns of religion. Many will profess to desire the same objects, and will offer to concur in prosecuting them to a certain point, who, if their offers were accepted, would only defeat the ends proposed——The Jews, however, aware of the snares thus laid for them, determined to prosecute their work alone^a.

That device having failed, they were assaulted by *the hostility of open enemies*. Complaints were made against them to the governing powers, and they were represented as plotting to regain their liberty and independence. Their former endeavours

^a Ezra iv. 1—3.

to cast off the Babylonish yoke were referred to as proofs of their present disposition to rebel against the king of Persia^b. It is in this way that the servants of God have been assailed in all ages: our blessed Lord was calumniated as an enemy to Cæsar; and his Apostles, as "movers of sedition:" and, if at any period of the Church an occasion can be found against the people of God, the record of it shall be brought against them in all future ages, and the evils of one party (as of the Puritans, for instance) shall be made to characterize religion itself, and all who profess it: and a sense of duty and of regard for the public welfare shall be artfully pleaded as an apology for the measures, which in reality were dictated by nothing but a rooted aversion to the cause of God^c.

This plan having too fatally succeeded, the Jews yielded to despondency, and for the space of fifteen years suspended the work in which they had engaged^d. *A spirit of indolence and supineness* soon prevailed among them, and would have operated to a total dereliction of the work, if God had not sent his prophets to rouse them from their lethargy. And indeed this is the greatest obstacle to every good work, since the longer it continues, the more entire is the ascendant which it gains over us.]

Through the preaching of the prophets, however, these difficulties were overcome—

[The Prophet Haggai justly reproved them for attending so carefully to their own accommodation, whilst the temple and the service of their God were altogether forgotten; and bade them carefully to "consider their ways^e." The Prophet Zechariah also urged them to bear in mind how awfully their fathers had suffered for their neglect of God^f; and then, by a variety of images which he had seen in visions, encouraged them with assurances of success in their labours^g. Thus were the people stimulated to exertion. But behold, no sooner did they resume their work, than their enemies renewed their application to the government to issue again their mandate to discontinue it^h. Whilst they were occupied only in building ceiled houses for themselves, no notice was taken of it: but as soon as they began to serve their God, their enemies were up in arms. And so it always is; zeal is approved in every thing except religion: but, as soon as ever it discovers itself in that, every effort will be made to repress it. This effort, however, was overruled, as

^b Ezra iv. 4—16.

^c Ezra iv. 14.

^d Ezra iv. 23, 24.

^e Hagg. i. 2—5, 7.

^f Zech. i. 1—6.

^g Read attentively the four first chapters of Zechariah in this particular view.

^h Ezra v. 1—10.

similar efforts have often been, for the furtherance of the work it was intended to destroy¹: and in the short space of four years the edifice was completed².]

The history thus viewed leads us naturally to notice,

II. The subserviency of a faithful ministry to the erection of God's spiritual temple—

The temple of old was a shadow of that spiritual temple which is erected for God in the hearts of men; "being built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, and Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone¹." The erection of this,

1. Is attended with the same difficulties—

[Who that begins truly to surrender up his soul to God, does not find many impediments from *pretended friends*? They will profess to approve of religion, and will propose to go with us to a certain length, that so they may have the greater influence to keep us from "following the Lord fully," and from serving him with our *whole* hearts — — — If we are enabled to withstand their efforts, then we shall be assailed by *open enemies*, who will accuse us of evil designs against both the Church and State; and will call forth the power of the civil magistrate, or of our more immediate governors, to suppress our zeal. Not unfrequently will they become our greatest foes, who by their relation to us ought rather to become our firmest protectors — — — And too often do *timidity and sloth* induce us to relax our efforts, till, if God do not by some special act of providence or grace awaken us, we lose the time for working, and, like the foolish virgins, experience for ever the fatal effects of our remissness — — —]

But the work of God in the soul,

2. Is carried on and perfected by the same means—

[God has established an order of men *on purpose to carry on this spiritual building* in the world^m. Paul and the other Apostles may be called "master-buildersⁿ;" but every pastor and teacher is engaged in the same work, according to the peculiar office that has been assigned him. "To impart to you some spiritual gift, to the end that ye may be established," and "to perfect that which is lacking in your faith," and in every way to be "helpers of your joy," is the great end of all

¹ Compare Ezra vi. 1—10. with Phil. i. 12.

² ver. 15.

¹ Eph. ii. 20—22.

^m Eph. iv. 11—13.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 10.

our ministerial labours: and, if we would labour with effect, we must use the very same means as Haggai and Zechariah did.

We call you then, Brethren, to "consider your ways:" consider what has hindered you hitherto; and what has been the consequence of intermitting your exertions in the service of your God. Have you not reason to blush and be confounded for the little progress that you have made in the divine life? — — — Consider too, as Zechariah so largely recommends, the promises of God. What assurances of success are given you by your gracious God, if only you will put your hands to the work in good earnest — — — "Up then, and be doing," every one of you; and "your God will be with you." Yield not to discouragements of any kind; for "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." And beware how you give way to carnal ease and indolence: surely it ill becomes you to be so intent, as most of us are, on earthly things, whilst the spiritual edifice advances so slowly. Let all inquire, what yet remains to be done in their own hearts, and, what may be done for God in the world at large: and let us, by "coming daily and hourly to Christ as the living foundation-stone, seek, as living stones, to be built up a spiritual house," that shall be "the habitation of God, through the Spirit," for ever and ever.]

° 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

CCCCXXXVI.

THE DECREE OF ARTAXERXES.

Ezra vii. 23. *Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven.*

WE are accustomed in divine ordinances to sit at the feet of Prophets and Apostles, and to learn of them: but this day we will take for our preceptor a heathen monarch; in following whose directions we shall not fail to approve ourselves faithful servants to our God. It was no less than fifty-nine years since the temple at Jerusalem had been rebuilt: but still the people, who had returned thither, were at a very low ebb, both in morality and religion. Ezra, who was yet remaining in Babylon, in the service of Artaxerxes, greatly lamented the want of piety amongst his own countrymen; and made request to the king, that he might go to Jerusalem for the purpose of inquiring into their state, and rectifying the

abuses which obtained amongst them. In answer to his requests, Artaxerxes issued a decree, authorizing him to go thither with as many of his countrymen as chose to accompany him, and encouraging all his subjects in the province of Babylon to assist him in his pious enterprise. The words before us breathe a spirit which we should scarcely have expected to find in a heathen prince: but it is remarkable that some of the richest effusions of piety in the whole Scriptures proceeded from heathen monarchs^a.

To make a due improvement of the words before us, we shall consider them,

I. In reference to the Jewish Church—

The state of the Jewish Church at this time is not unlike to that in which it was in the days of Ezra—

[Though the temple worship was restored, it was carried on by the Jews without any zeal for God's honour, or any of that spirituality of mind which is the very essence of all acceptable worship. Nor was the Law of God regarded amongst them with any just measure of submission: for, in direct opposition to its most authoritative dictates, they formed connexions with the heathen round about them, and thus defiled and dishonoured the holy seed which were separated for the service of Almighty God^b. So at this time the Jewish people are at a very low ebb, both in respect of morals and religion. They are indeed, by the providence of God, placed in a situation in which no other people upon earth stand: for they alone, of all people upon the face of the globe, are incapable of serving their God according to the directions of their own Law, and the dictates of their own conscience. But, at the same time, they shew no sense of privation on this account, nor any desire to honour God in the services which they do render: for there is universally among them, in all their synagogues, a degree of irreverence, which we should scarcely expect to find amongst heathens in the worship of their idols. It is impossible to behold them in their religious services, and not see how thick a veil is yet upon their hearts. Nor do they manifest any respect for their own Law, especially in its sublimer precepts. Of some superstitious rites they are observant with pertinacity and zeal; but of real holiness of heart and life they are ignorant in the extreme: and beyond the gains and pleasures of this present world, the great mass of their nation appear scarcely to entertain a thought.]

^a Darius and Nebuchadnezzar.

^b Ezra ix. 1—9.

But to us is given, no less than to Ezra, a command to advance their welfare—

[Ezra received a commission from Artaxerxes to go and rectify the abuses which obtained at Jerusalem, and to place the worship of God on a footing more consonant with his Law, and more worthy of his divine majesty. And have we no command to seek the welfare of that degraded people? Are we not told what God's purpose is respecting them; namely, to "raise up the tabernacle of David which is fallen down, and to close the breaches thereof; to raise up its ruins, and to build it as in the days of old?" Are we not told, also, who the builders are to be, and how strictly God enjoins us to execute his work? This is God's express command to us, even to us, strangers of the Gentiles: "The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee. And the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted^d." With their *material* temple we have indeed nothing to do: but for the erection of God's spiritual temple amongst them we are bound to labour; removing all the obstacles to their salvation^e, and proclaiming to them the advent of their Messiah, saying, "Behold your salvation! behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him!" Yes, "to all the cities of Judah we should cry, Behold your God!"^f]

In this work we should engage with all diligence—

[It is not to be effected by good wishes merely, but by great and laborious exertions. It was not without great exertions on the part of men that the Gentiles were converted to the faith of Christ: and the same kind of efforts which the Apostles made for the conversion of the Gentiles we are to make for the restoration of the Jews to the favour of their God. We must feel compassion towards them; and go forth in dependence upon God to search them out in the cloudy and dark day, and to bring them home to the fold of the great and good Shepherd. In this work all should engage, according to their power. As "the Jews, when scattered abroad upon the persecution of Stephen, went everywhere preaching the word^h," so should we avail ourselves of the opportunity afforded by the dispersion of the Jews, to draw their attention to the sacred oracles which testify of Christ, and to make known to them the Messiah whom their fathers crucified. I hesitate not to

^c Amos ix. 11.

^d Isai. lx. 10, 12.

^e Isai. lxii. 10.

^f Isai. lxii. 11.

^g Isai. xl. 9.

^h Acts xi. 19.

say, that this is our duty. It is not merely enjoined in that general commission to "go and preach the Gospel to all nations," but it is devolved upon us as an office which it is at the peril of our souls to neglect. God has told us, that he has made us the depositaries of his Gospel, not for our benefit merely, but for the benefit of his outcast people: "As ye in times past have not believed God, but have now obtained mercy through their unbelief, even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy¹." It is, therefore, not only *a* duty to rebuild the desolated Church of Zion, but *our* duty, even the duty of every one who has himself obtained mercy of the Lord: and it is a work in which we should engage, no less from a sense of our own obligations to God than from compassion for the necessities of our Jewish brethren.]

But, as the Jewish Church was typical of that which exists under the Christian dispensation, it will be proper to consider the words of our text,

II. In reference to the Church which is amongst us—

The edifying of the Christian Church should be an object near to all our hearts: and it is remarkable that St. Peter applies to this subject the forecited expressions of the Prophet Amos, respecting the tabernacle of David; which, if not so interpreted, we should have been led to confine to the Jewish Church. And, beyond all doubt, it is our duty to labour in this field, and to exert ourselves both among nominal Christians and the heathen world, for the enlargement and establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth.

But I propose rather to limit my observations at this time to individuals amongst ourselves.

Ye, Brethren, need to have God's work advanced in the midst of you—

["Ye are God's house," as God has said^k: ye also are expressly called the temples of God, in which he lives and dwells^l. But in whom is God honoured as he ought to be? In whom are found sacrifices so pure, so spiritual, so abundant, as God calls for at our hands? Truly there is much amiss in all of us; much evil to be rectified, and much defective to be

¹ Rom. xi. 30, 31.

^k Heb. iii. 6.

^l 2 Cor. vi. 16.

supplied. Who has not reason for self-condemnation, when he reflects on this injunction which is given by a heathen? Instead of being alive to "*every thing* that is commanded by the God of heaven," there are many of the divine precepts which we are apt to overlook: and, instead of doing every thing "*diligently*" as unto "the God of heaven," how listless are we, and heartless in the greater part of our services! and, instead of living only for the Lord, to how great an extent do we live rather to ourselves! Truly the temple of our God needs to be purged again and again of the corruptions that prevail within it; and a more entire devotion of all that we have and are unto the Lord may justly be required at our hands.]

I call you, then, to engage in the Lord's work with your whole hearts—

[We will suppose that you are built upon the Lord Jesus Christ, as the foundation which God has laid in Zion^m. But there is much to be done by every one amongst you. No man is contented with having laid a foundation: he proceeds to build upon it; and never considers his work as finished, till he has brought forth the top-stone. So it must be in this spiritual building which is begun within us: we must "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:" or, to keep to the figure which is more appropriate to our subject, we must come to Christ daily "as lively stones, that we may be built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christⁿ." Our profiting ought to appear, so that every one who sees us may acknowledge that God is with us of a truth. To this, then, would I call you: and this duty would I impress upon your minds, if ever you would honour God, or walk worthy of your high calling. And remember, I pray you, whose command this is: it is the command of the God of heaven. Remember, too, whose work it is: it is the work of the God of heaven. O! learn of a heathen to venerate the divine authority, and to exert yourselves to the uttermost to promote the divine glory.]

And now let me call you to obey this imperial mandate,

1. In a way of personal reformation—

[At the time of the passover, the Jews swept every corner of their houses, in order to purge out from them every particle of leaven which might have escaped their more general and superficial search. And this is what we also are called to do.

^m Isai. xxviii. 16. 1 Cor. iii. 11.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 4—6.

Alas! there are many evil dispositions which lurk within us, and which a superficial survey will not enable us to detect. Pride, envy, discontent, uncharitableness, sloth, are deeply implanted in our nature, and, with many other corrupt propensities, spring up from time to time. O be diligent in "purging out this old leaven, that ye may be a new lump;" since by profession "ye are," and in reality ye ought to be, "unleavened!" And let spiritual sacrifices abound within you, even the "sacrifices of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."]

2. In a way of ministerial exertion—

[Here I come to that which the occasion peculiarly calls for, and which is more immediately referred to in my text—the efforts which are to be made for the restoring of God's worship and service in the Jewish Church. Surely this is the duty of all; and it should be performed by us with all diligence.

In this, persons of rank and influence ought to take the lead. Who can see a heathen monarch, the most powerful monarch that day upon the face of the earth, thus interesting himself for his Jewish subjects, and not wish, that all monarchs, with "their counsellors" (for all the counsellors of Artaxerxes concurred with him in this act) were embarked in this holy cause, and exerted all their influence for the promotion of it? — — —

In this the clergy, also, should be most distinguished. Ezra was what, in modern language, would be called a great divine: and he was in a post of honour at the court of Artaxerxes: but he satisfied not himself with the luxury of strenuous idleness and learned ease: he sought to improve his talents and influence, for the honour of God, and the welfare of his people. Gladly, therefore, did he avail himself of the liberty accorded to him of going to Jerusalem for the purpose of remedying the evils which obtained there, and of establishing, on a more becoming scale, the ordinances of divine worship. It was an office of great labour; yet he willingly undertook it. And does not this shew, how those who are distinguished for rank and learning amongst the clergy should employ their talents and influence for the Lord? Surely they could not render unto God a more acceptable service, or perform one more honourable to themselves, than by labouring, according to their respective abilities, for the advancement of God's worship among the Jews. The very first work of Ezra, too, may furnish them with a profitable hint: for he immediately sent forth persons to find "ministers," and "men of understanding," who should co-operate with him in this labour of love°. And, truly, such instruments are wanting at this

° Ezra viii. 16—18.

time; and, till such are found, we cannot hope for any great success in our undertakings. Let us "pray, then, to the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest:" for "the harvest truly is great; but the labourers are few."

The readiness with which all the people of Babylon concurred in this good work shews how all classes of the community amongst ourselves should unite in the work that is now proposed to us. They contributed no less than eighty thousand pounds in silver, and one hundred and fifty thousand pounds in gold, besides a vast abundance of wheat, and wine, and oil, and salt, for the purpose of honouring God in his temple at Jerusalem. This was done, I say, *by heathens*, to honour *the God of the Jews*. What, then, should not be done by *us Christians*, who *profess to serve the God of the Jews*, and to feel our obligations to him for all the wonders of redeeming love? Should not *we*, according to our power, be alike liberal? Should not all ranks and orders amongst *us* concur in this good work? And should not "*our* merchandise and our hire (whether in 'wheat, or wine, or oil, or salt,' or any other article,) be holiness to the Lord?" Surely I shall not call upon you in vain. You will not suffer the recommendations of an earthly monarch to be of more avail with his subjects than the edict of Almighty God with you. Ezra was authorized to "accept *all* the silver and the gold which he could find in all the province of Babylon" for this great object, and to "lay it out" to the best of his judgment "for the honour of his God⁹." And whatever the liberality of the Christian public shall commit to the disposal of those who have the direction of this great concern will be expended, I trust, with economy and wisdom, in such a way as most to advance the glory of God, in the restoration and salvation of his outcast people.]

^p Isai. xxiii. 18.

⁹ ver. 16—18.

CCCCXXXVII.

EZRA'S HUMILIATION FOR THE SINS OF HIS PEOPLE.

Ezra ix. 5, 6. *And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God, and said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.*

IT is common both for individuals and Churches to appear hopeful before men, when a nearer acquaintance with them would furnish us with abundant cause of grief and shame. At Ezra's coming to Jerusalem, about fourscore years after the Babylonish captivity, he found the temple built, and the ordinances of religion statedly performed. But on inquiring more particularly into the state of those who now inhabited the Holy Land, he received such information as filled him with the deepest anguish.

We propose to consider,

I. The reason of his sorrow—

Many of the people had connected themselves in marriage both with the Canaanites and other heathens around them. This he justly regarded as a most heinous evil,

1. As being a violation of an express command—

[Ezra himself speaks of it in this view^a. It is possible that, whilst the generality sought only the gratification of their own corrupt appetites, "the princes and rulers, who were chief in this matter," justified their conduct on the ground of policy. They might urge, that, being few in number, it was desirable, for their own preservation, to make alliances with those whose hostility they feared. It is certain that in this way many set their own reasonings in opposition to God's revealed will. But reason is altogether out of its place on such occasions. God's authority is not to be trampled on by us: we are not at liberty to sit in judgment on his commands, and to determine how far it is expedient to obey them: when once we are told, "Thus saith the Lord," we have no option, no alternative left: a cheerful and unreserved compliance is our bounden duty, and our highest wisdom.]

2. As having an evident tendency to bring the people back to idolatry—

[It was for their idolatries more especially that the nation had been sent into captivity; and a recurrence of the same evils was most likely to result from so intimate a connexion with idolaters. This danger had been particularly pointed out, when the prohibition had been originally given^b: and their disregard of this danger shewed how little they had profited by the judgments that had been inflicted on them, or the mercies

^a ver. 10—12. compared with Deut. vii. 2, 3. ^b Deut. vii. 4.

that had been vouchsafed unto them. But thus it is with all who seek the friendship of the world: God has told them, that "friendship with the world is enmity with God^c;" that it is impossible to maintain communion with both^d; and that therefore all who cultivate the friendship of the world will be regarded and treated as the enemies of God^e: yet they will run the risk, and for the sake of gratifying their corrupt wishes, will endanger the everlasting salvation of their souls. O that those who are inclined to take worldly persons for their associates, and especially those who are tempted to unite with them in the indissoluble bonds of marriage, would consider the guilt and danger of such measures, ere they bring upon themselves the wrath of an offended God! If only they would look around them and see the injury which others have sustained in their souls by such conduct, they would pause, and not venture to purchase any fancied good at so great a price.]

How great his sorrow on this occasion was, we may judge from,

II. The expressions of it—

That which first calls for our notice is, the expression of his grief the instant he was informed of their misconduct—

[This was more violent than any of which we read in the Holy Scriptures. Often have men rent their mantle and their garments; but of him alone we are told that "he plucked off the hair of his head and of his beard." In the first paroxysm of his grief he was almost distracted; yea, he was so overwhelmed as to be incapable of speech or action: hence "he sat down astonished," as one altogether stupified through excess of sorrow. And shall we think all this extravagant? No truly, if we duly estimate the evil they had committed, and the danger to which the whole nation was reduced^f. We are told of David, that "horror took hold upon him," and that "rivers of tears ran down his cheeks, because of those who kept not God's law:" and St. Paul appeals to God himself, that he had "great sorrow and continual heaviness in his heart for his brethren's sake^g." We may be sure therefore that the grief which Ezra manifested was no more than what the occasion called for.]

But his humiliation before God is that which more particularly demands our attention—

["At the time of the evening sacrifice," as if revived and

^c Jam. iv. 4.

^d Matt. vi. 24. and 2 Cor. vi. 14, 15.

^e 1 John ii. 15—17.

^f ver. 14.

^g Rom. ix. 1—3.

encouraged by the consideration of the great atonement, "he arose from his heaviness, and fell upon his knees, and spread out his hands unto the Lord his God," and confessed with shame and anguish of heart both his own sins and the sins of all the people. What a just view had he of national transgressions! Many would have thought, that, because he disapproved of the evils that had been committed, he had no share in the guilt contracted by them, nor any occasion to humble himself before God on account of them: but the members of the body politic are, in their corporate capacity, like the members of the natural body, all to a certain degree responsible for those evils, which generally, though not universally, prevail among them. At the day of judgment indeed, none will have to answer for any thing but what they themselves were personally guilty of; but in this world, where alone nations can be dealt with as nations, we should consider ourselves as participating in whatever relates to the nation at large.

And here we cannot but admire the humility with which he confessed the sins of the nation before God, and the fervour with which he implored the forgiveness of them. O that we felt even for our own sins, as he felt for the sins of others! However "fools may make a mock at it," sin is no light evil: there is no contrition too deep for us to feel on account of sin, nor any earnestness too great to use in order to obtain the remission of it. Let the view then of this holy man put us all to shame: let us blush and be confounded at the thought that our repentance from day to day is so cold and superficial; and let us tremble for ourselves, lest we be found at last to have been hypocrites and dissemblers with God. We are told plainly enough what is that repentance which godly sorrow will produce^b: let us therefore look to it that we "approve ourselves to be clear in this matter."^c]

APPLICATION—

[And now, methinks, the evening sacrifice is just offered: "now once, in the end of the world, hath Christ appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself^d." O let our eyes be fixed on that "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!" Let us spread before him both our national and personal transgressions; and let us lay them all on the head of that heavenly victim; not doubting but that, "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness^e."^f]

^b 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.

^d Heb. ix. 26.

^e 1 John i. 9.

CCCCXXXVIII.

USE OF GOD'S DIVERSIFIED DISPENSATIONS.

Ezra ix. 13, 14. *After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; should we again break thy commandments?*

THE intention of God in all his dispensations, whether of providence or of grace, is to deter men from sin: and it becomes all his people to co-operate with him in this important work. Rulers in particular are invested with power by God himself for this very end: nor do they ever appear to more advantage than when they exert themselves to the uttermost in the support of God's authority, and in promoting the best interests of those over whom they are placed.

Ezra, perhaps about eighty years after the return of the Jews from Babylon, was permitted by Artaxerxes king of Persia to go and visit his brethren in Judea, and was empowered by him to rectify all abuses that he might find among them. After his arrival, he heard, to his unspeakable grief, that many of them had joined in marriage with heathen women. He therefore humbled himself before God on their account; and looking back upon all that they had suffered for their iniquities, and on the marvellous deliverance which God had vouchsafed unto them, he expressed his surprise, his horror, his indignation at their great impiety.

From his words we shall take occasion to consider,

I. God's diversified dispensations towards us—

God visited his people of old with alternate mercies and judgments: and thus he has dealt with *us* also.

He has visited our sins with judgments—

[The judgments which we have of late experienced, have been exceeding heavy* — — — And it is of the utmost im-

* Here particulars should be mentioned.

portance that we should acknowledge the hand of God in them. They spring not out of the dust: they arise not *merely* from the ambition of our enemies, or the errors of our own government. God uses men as instruments, just as he did the Assyrians and Chaldeans, to punish his people: but still it is His hand alone that inflicts the stroke^b: and, if we do not trace his displeasure in all that we have suffered, it is not possible that we should ever make a proper improvement of it.

We must confess, however, that our sufferings have by no means equalled our deserts^c. Take any *one* of our national sins^d, and it might well bring down upon us all that we have endured. If God had proceeded against us according to the tremendous aggregate of our iniquities, we should have been made as Sodom and Gomorrha.]

He has now also vouchsafed us a deliverance—

[The “deliverance” granted to the Jews in their return from Babylon, was not inferior to that which they had formerly experienced in their departure from Egypt. And has not ours also been exceeding great^e? — — — In this too must we view the hand of God. Whoever were *the means*, God was *the author* of it. It is he who produces all the changes that arise in the state of individuals^f, or of kingdoms^g. And as the discerning of his agency in our afflictions is necessary to effect our humiliation, so the beholding of it in our mercies is necessary to excite our gratitude.]

To promote a suitable improvement of these dispensations, let us consider,

II. The effect they should have upon us—

If the destruction of sin be the end which God proposes to himself in all his conduct towards us, then we should endeavour to make every thing subservient to that end. The pointed interrogation in the text strongly shews in what light we should view a renewed violation of God's commandments, after he has taken such pains to enforce the observance of them.

^b Ps. xvii. 13. Isai. x. 5 — 7, 13—15. and xxxvii. 24 — 26. Gen. xlv. 8.

^c Ps. ciii. 10.

^d Our contempt of the Gospel, our open profaneness, our traffic in human blood, &c.

^e Here it should be set forth.

^f 1 Sam. ii. 6—8.

^g Jer. xviii. 6, 7, 9.

1. How *unreasonable* would it be!

[No man can read the account of Pharaoh's obstinacy in the midst of all his successive judgments and deliverances, and not stand amazed at his more than brutish stupidity. Yet it is precisely thus that we shall act, if we do not now put away our sins, and submit ourselves entirely to God's revealed will. And how unreasonable, or rather we should say irrational, such conduct would be, God himself tells us: he even calls heaven and earth to express their astonishment at it, as not only levelling us with the beasts, but reducing us to a state far below them^b. And if we be guilty of it, he will justly vent his indignation against us, as he did against his people of old; "They are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite the Lord? O foolish people, and unwise!"^c]

2. How *ungrateful*!

[Ingratitude is considered as one of the greatest aggravations that can be found in any offence of man against his fellow-man: and how much more must it enhance the guilt we contract in our disobedience to God! See what stress God himself lays upon this in the transgressions of David^k, and Solomon^l, and Hezekiah^m; and will it not stamp a ten-fold malignity also on our offencesⁿ?]

3. How *dangerous*!

[This is particularly noticed by Ezra, in the words following the text: and the state of the Jews at this moment is an awful comment upon it. We are yet in the hands of our God; and if we still rebel against him, he can easily bring again upon us the calamities which he has just removed, or send others far more afflictive. He tells us, that, as the impenitence of the Jews was the reason of his continuing to afflict them^o, so he will "punish us seven times more for our sins^p," if we now continue in them. To what a state of misery and dereliction we may in that case expect to be reduced, we may judge from what was actually experienced by the Jewish nation^q. But the Lord grant that we may not so provoke the Majesty of heaven!]

ADDRESS—

[Remember that God is not an indifferent spectator of

^b Isai. i. 2, 3. ⁱ Deut. xxxii. 5, 6. ^k 2 Sam. xii. 7—9.

^l 1 Kings xi. 9. ^m 2 Chron. xxxii. 25.

ⁿ See what construction God himself puts upon such conduct, Jer. vii. 9, 10.

^o Isai. ix. 12, 17, 21. and x. 4. ^p Lev. xxvi. 18, 21, 24, 28.

^q Judg. x. 11—14.

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our conduct. Sin is "that abominable thing which his soul hateth^r:" and he will surely destroy either it, or him that retains it. And if his judgments be not inflicted on the sinner in this life, there still is a future day of retribution, when every man shall give account of himself to God, and receive the just recompence of all his actions.

Let this then be the improvement which we determine, through grace, to make of God's present dispensations. Let us reflect upon them as means of exciting us to holy obedience; and let every one of us shudder at the thought of ever again breaking the least of God's commandments.]

^r Jer. xliv. 4.

NEHEMIAH.

CCCCXXXIX.

THE ZEAL OF NEHEMIAH.

Neh. ii. 20. *The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build.*

WHOEVER engages diligently in the work of God, must expect trials: as it is said in the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus, “My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptations^a.” The ungodly will deride our efforts, and put the most unfavourable construction upon them, that the most ingenious malice can invent. The pious labours of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, though sanctioned by the monarch himself, were regarded by his enemies as indications of folly, and as preparatives for rebellion^b. But Nehemiah, as David had done before him, “encouraged himself in the Lord his God^c.”

It is my intention,

I. To set before you the graces he exercised—

In the words which we have just read, we behold,

1. His confidence—

[I am not aware that Nehemiah received from God any particular commission to engage in the work he had undertaken, or any direct promise of success: yet did he assure himself that God would prosper him. And this displayed a proper confidence in God. For he felt a consciousness, that in all that he had undertaken, he was seeking no interest of his own, but simply the honour of his God. In any matter

^a Eccl. ii. 1.

^b ver. 19.

^c 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

that was purely personal, he would not have been justified in indulging so confident an expectation: but in a work like that in which he was engaged, and to the prosecution of which he was impelled by a high principle of love to God, he could have no doubt but that he should receive from heaven such a measure of support as should bring his labours to a happy issue. The desire to embark in it had been stirred up in him by the Spirit of God: he trusted, therefore, that the blessing of God would accompany his endeavours.

This confidence, though right to be indulged, by no means warrants us to limit God as to the time, or manner, or measure of the success which he shall vouchsafe unto us. These things must be left to his all-wise disposal: for he alone knows what will tend most to the advancement of his own glory. But so far as the attainment of our objects will bring glory to him, we may assure ourselves, that we shall never be suffered to labour for him in vain.]

2. His zeal—

[Great were the difficulties which he had to encounter. For an hundred years since the return of the Jews from Babylon, had the walls of Jerusalem continued in a most dilapidated state, and all the gates had been destroyed by fire. No attempt had yet been made even to remove the rubbish^d. Nor were the princes among the people at all disposed to co-operate with him in an effort to repair the ruins: they, alas! “would not put their neck to the work^e.” His brethren of Judah, also, who should have been foremost in the work, discouraged it, by representing the task as hopeless and impracticable^f. His enemies at the same time exerted themselves to defeat his enterprise, by pouring contempt upon it, and conspiring, by all possible means, to counteract it^g. But Nehemiah was determined to execute the purpose which he had conceived: and for that end set all hands to work, every one in his own proper district, that, by a great and simultaneous effort, the desired object might be attained. And whereas he was menaced by armed bands who threatened to destroy him, he armed the labourers, each with his sword or spear, that they might be ready at an instant to repel any assault that might be made upon them; so that, as it were, they held the sword in one hand, and carried on the work with the other^h. This was a conduct worthy of a servant of the Most High God. In fact, the confidence he expressed, and the determination he formed, had a strict reference to each other. A servant of God was authorized to maintain the confidence, and was bound, in

^d ver. 13, 14.

^e Neh. iii. 5.

^f Neh. iv. 10.

^g Neh. iv. 8.

^h Neh. iv. 16—18.

dependence on God, to form and execute the determination: "The Lord God, *HE* will prosper us; therefore *we, his servants*, will arise and build," neither regarding difficulties, however great, nor fearing enemies, however powerful.]

Admiring the virtues of this eminent saint, I proceed,

II. To commend them to your imitation—

Be ye, my Brethren, followers of him,

1. In reference to God's work in the world at large—

[The world is one great kingdom that belongs to Christ. But far is it from being in a state worthy of its Great Proprietor! Truly it is, as it were, in ruins; one great and shapeless mass of desolation, bearing upon the whole face of it the relentless efforts of the destroyer. And should not we, when informed of its miserable condition, be filled with grief, as Nehemiah for Jerusalem, and implore mercy for it, as he did for that ruined city? Should we not improve our influence for its good; and be ready, by our own personal exertions, to promote to the uttermost its welfare? What, if they who should take the lead are careless and supine? What, if many of our own brethren are lukewarm and desponding? What, if our means for helping forward its concerns are very narrow and contracted? What, if those who are hostile to such an attempt, exert themselves to intimidate and counteract us? Should we therefore sit down in listlessness and despair? No: we should encourage ourselves in God, and put forth all our energies in his service. In the incredibly short space of fifty-two days, Nehemiah, in the midst of all his discouragements, accomplished his work: for, we are told, "the people had a mind to work¹." And who shall say what Christians might effect, if they were but penetrated with becoming zeal, and would combine their efforts in a judicious way. From the state both of the Jewish and Gentile world, any one would have supposed it impossible for a few devout and pious persons to effect any thing in so short a space of time as twenty or thirty years: yet, behold, plans originating with a few, who contemplated nothing but a little partial benefit, have spread almost over the world itself their beneficial efficacy; insomuch that what was at first but as a cloud, the size of a man's hand, has already overspread the heavens, and descended in fertilizing showers on every quarter of the globe. Let us take courage from what we have seen, and press forward in the

¹ Neh. iv. 6.

work that is yet before us; not contemplating difficulties, but confiding in our God, and going on in his strength to fulfil his holy and blessed will.]

2. In reference to God's work in our own souls—

[These, too, are in a fearfully dilapidated state; so that one who looks at an arm of flesh only would be ready to despair. And need I say what discouragements are put in the way of those who would serve their God? Amidst princes that are supine, friends that are lukewarm, and spectators that are arrayed in hostility against us, it requires much faith and patience to carry us forward in so arduous an undertaking. But we should address ourselves to the work, and combine all our energies to repair the breaches which sin has made upon our souls. We should put on, too, the whole armour of God, and fight the good fight of faith. We should suffer neither men nor devils to deter us from our work, but should proceed with diligence till the whole work of God is wrought within us. If we would proceed with the zeal which such a cause should inspire, what might we not effect, perhaps in the space of a few days or weeks? Surely we should make our profiting to appear, to the honour of God, and to the confusion of all our enemies. Doubtless those who united not with Nehemiah would pour contempt upon his efforts, and deride him as a weak or wicked enthusiast. But is there a man in the universe that does not applaud him *now*? Thus must you expect to be derided now: but the day is coming, when God himself will applaud you before the assembled universe, and they who now condemn you will bitterly regret that they did not follow your steps.]

CCCCXL.

THE EFFICACY OF ZEAL AND DILIGENCE.

Nehem. iv. 6. *The people had a mind to work.*

GREAT and useful undertakings are often declined, from an idea that we are not able to carry them into effect, when, in fact, nothing is wanting to ensure success in them, but zeal and diligence. The history before us strongly exemplifies this remark. The walls of Jerusalem still continued in their desolate condition, notwithstanding the Jews had returned thither about ninety years: but, at the instigation of one single man, the people combined;

and engaging heartily in the work, they effected in a short space of time what had appeared utterly impracticable: Nehemiah says, "So built we the wall; for the people had a mind to work."

Let us consider,

I. The reason assigned for their success—

The work which the people had to perform was attended with many difficulties—

[The removal of the rubbish^a was of itself no considerable labour, considering how few hands there were to engage in it. But beside this, the enemies of the Jews exerted themselves by ridicule, by menaces, and by various other devices^b, to discourage the undertaking, and to prevent the execution of it. The treachery and supineness of some among the Jews themselves^c formed also a very formidable obstacle in the way of those who desired to accomplish the work.]

But by zeal and diligence they were enabled to accomplish it with incredible despatch—

[Arduous as the work was, it was all finished in two and fifty days^d. But how was it effected so soon? We are told, in the text; "The people had a mind to the work:" every one engaged in it with his whole heart: they regarded neither fatigue nor danger: they would not so much as take off their clothes during the whole time, except for the sake of cleanliness^e; and they wore their swords by their side while they wrought with their hands^f, that they might be ready to resist their enemies in case of an attack. By this union of courageous zeal and unremitting diligence they effected their purpose, to the astonishment and confusion of all their enemies^g.]

To shew that this subject is capable of very useful improvement, we shall notice,

II. The instruction we may gather from it—

There are two truths that may justly be deduced from this history;

1. In every thing we have to do for God, zeal and diligence are necessary—

[The Jews at that time were actuated by a religious zeal,

^a ver. 2.

^b Neh. ii. 10, 19. and Neh. iv. 1, 3, 7, 8. and Neh. vi. 8, 9.

^c ver. 10, 12. and Neh. vi. 18, 19.

^d Neh. vi. 15.

^e ver. 23.

^f ver. 16—18.

^g Neh. vi. 16.

and exerted themselves for God^b. And the work which we have to do for God is by no means dissimilar, if only we consider what a typical aspect there was in the whole of their captivity and restoration¹. We may at least be permitted to *accommodate* this subject to the reparation of the soul for God, after the desolations it has suffered through the incursions of sin. We see that year after year the souls of men lie in ruins; that the generality have no heart to seek their restoration to their primitive grandeur; and that the greater part of those who begin to labour in this work, make little progress. But to what is this owing? The truth is, "they have no mind to the work:" they do not *love* their work: repentance is a burthen: prayer is a task: self-denial is a drudgery: they would rather be excused from every part of their duty: they would not think of communion with God, or of conformity to his image, if they were not driven to it by an imperious necessity, a fear of everlasting torments. Hence their exertions are weak and intermitted; and their enemies are suffered to pull down their work, as fast as *they* build it up: so that, after an interval of months and years, little, if any, progress is made in their work. Ah! think of this, ye who are complaining of the low state of your souls! It would have been thus with respect to the walls of Jerusalem, if the people had been as lukewarm as you: but "they had a mind to work;" and so must you, if you would do any thing with effect: "Whatever your hand findeth to do, you must do it with your might^k."]

2. In every thing we have to do for God, zeal and diligence will ensure success—

[In the work of our souls we have to encounter difficulties not unlike to those which the Jews had to cope with; we have much rubbish to be removed, many reproaches and menaces to withstand, and many discouragements from weak or false brethren to surmount. But we need not fear: if we engage heartily in our work, we shall assuredly succeed. Nothing shall be able to obstruct our progress: yea, the opposition we meet with shall but inflame our ardour, and increase our energy; and we shall proceed triumphantly, in spite of the assaults either of men or devils. We do not mean to say, that our own arm can effect these things: we know full well that it cannot; and that, of ourselves, we cannot do any thing that is good: but if we go forth with zeal and diligence in a humble dependence upon God, he will enable us to fulfil his will; yea, "through His strength we shall be able to do all

^b Neh. ii. 17, 18.

¹ See Isai. xl. 2. and lii. 9, 10. and lxxv. 18.

^k Eccl. ix. 10.

things¹." He is pledged to assist those who trust in him^m; and the weakest that relies on him shall be "more than conqueror:" yea, the weaker we are in ourselves, the more shall "his strength be perfected in our weaknessⁿ." Let us but trust in him, and "the wall shall be built, though in troublous times^o;" and "what has been begun in grace shall soon be perfected in glory^p."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who make excuses for not engaging in the work of their souls—

[The generality are saying, "The time for the Lord's work is not yet come^q." But whatever excuses men urge for their delay, the true and only reason of it is, "They have no mind to the work." Be assured, my Brethren, that when God shall call you into judgment, the veil with which you cover your hypocrisy will be found thinner than the spider's web. Rest not then any longer in such dangerous delusions; but arise, and set yourselves to the work without delay.]

2. To those who have entered on the Lord's work—

[To exert yourselves with effect, there is need not only of individual zeal, but also of general and cordial co-operation. The builders all had their proper work assigned them: and of some it is said, "They built before their own houses^r:" and though the work seemed but ill adapted for females, some wrought in "concert with their daughters^s." How prosperous would our exertions be, if we would imitate them in these respects! See, Beloved, what work you have to do near your own houses. If all who profess to be engaged in this good work would attend diligently to their children, their servants, their dependents; if they would visit their sick neighbours, and labour to instruct those to whom they can gain easy and familiar access; methinks the wall would soon be built, to the admiration of men, and the confusion of devils. Let there then be a general zeal amongst you, and a determination to co-operate in every labour of love. It is mentioned to the disgrace of the nobles, that "they put not their necks to the work of the Lord^t." O let there not be any such amongst you! Rather, let the example of Nehemiah and his followers animate us all: then shall the work proceed rapidly around us, and our "Jerusalem shall soon become a praise in the earth^u."]

¹ Phil. iv. 13.

^m Ps. cxxv. 1.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^o Dan. ix. 25.

^p Phil. i. 6.

^q Hagg. i. 2.

^r Neh. iii. 28—30.

^s Neh. iii. 12.

^t Neh. iii. 5.

^u Isai. lxii. 7.

CCCCXLI.

THE FEAR OF GOD A PRINCIPLE OF ACTION.

Neh. v. 15. *So did not I, because of the fear of God.*

IT is obvious that there are in the world a people whose conduct differs widely from that of the world around them: and, in attempting to account for it, some impute it to pride and vanity, some to weakness and folly, and some to downright hypocrisy. But, if men would examine into this matter with candour, they might easily find a principle abundantly sufficient to account for all the singularity they observe: and this principle is "The fear of God." By this Nehemiah was actuated, whilst, in the governing of Israel, he maintained a system directly opposed to that of all who had preceded him. They all had exacted from the people, even in their low impoverished state, such contributions as they judged necessary for the upholding of their dignity and the discharge of their official duties. And Nehemiah might have felt himself fully justified in following their example, which was originally ordained by legitimate authority, and afterwards established by long uninterrupted usage. But, in existing circumstances, he judged the practice to be oppressive; and therefore he would no longer suffer it, because he was under the influence of a principle which was sufficient to outweigh all selfish considerations: "So did not I, because of the fear of God."

Now, it will be no unedifying subject, if we consider,

I. The principle by which he was actuated—

It is called, in my text, "The fear of God;" by which we are to understand, not a dread of God's displeasure, but rather a holy filial fear, comprehending under it an habitual respect to God; a respect to,

1. His word, as *the rule* of our conduct—

[The maxims of the world are not unfrequently the very reverse of those which are inculcated in the Sacred Volume. We need not go back to the philosophers of Greece and

Rome, to shew the erroneousness of their opinions: the sentiments even of the Christian world are, in many respects, very far from according with the dictates of inspiration. Pride is by many held as equivalent with magnanimity: and humility, such as God requires, is as little approved amongst us, as it was amongst the unenlightened heathen. As to the duties of love to God, of faith in Christ, of entire devotedness to the pursuit of things invisible and eternal, we well know that they are kept altogether upon the back-ground, except, indeed, as sentiments proper to be delivered from the pulpit, but equally proper to be banished from all the scenes of social converse. But the man who is under the influence of the fear of God will not suffer himself to be regulated by the opinions of men; but "by the fear of the Lord he will surely depart from evil," and in every doubtful point will inquire, "What saith the Lord?"

2. His authority, as *the reason* of our conduct—

[A Christian may doubtless have many reasons for acting in this or that particular way: he may judge such a line of conduct to be conducive to his own comfort, and to the benefit of others. But all such motives will be in perfect subordination to the divine will, which he will determine to obey, whether the immediate act be in accordance with his own interests or in opposition to them. A man under the fear of God will not consider whether he shall gain or lose, whether he shall please or displease, by any act; his only concern will be to approve himself to God. If urged by any considerations of human authority or personal interest, his answer is, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for I cannot but do the things which God commands."]

3. His glory, as *the end* of our conduct—

[The real saint feels that "God in all things should be glorified:" and he will not be satisfied with any thing which will not conduce to this end. This idea he will carry into the most common transactions of his life: "Whether he eat or drink, or whatever he do, he will do all to the glory of God." In relation to this matter, there will be in him a tenderness, a sensibility, a great refinement of mind, such as, to a superficial observer, shall appear to have led him into great inconsistencies. St. Paul acted sometimes as under the Law, and sometimes as free from the Law; accommodating himself to the prejudices or weakness of men, as he saw occasion. But, whatever was his course, his object was the same; namely, to serve and honour God: and every one who truly fears God will propose to himself the same great end, and

conduct himself in such a way as appears to him best calculated to effect it.]

Such being the principle by which Nehemiah was actuated, let us notice,

II. The effect it produced on his life and conversation—

Methinks there is a striking agreement between the conduct of Nehemiah and of the Apostle Paul. St. Paul was entitled to demand support from the Christian Church, to which he ministered : but, so far was he from insisting on his right, that he wrought with his own hands, night and day, in order to support himself, and to exempt others from what they might have accounted a burthen*. Thus Nehemiah, doubtless, was entitled to support from those over whom he was placed : but this right having been abused, he waved it altogether ; that so he might both lighten the burthens of his people and set to all an example of forbearance and love.

We see, then, in him how the fear of God will operate wherever it exists as a principle of action in the soul. It will surely teach us the following lessons :

1. Not to conform ourselves to any custom till we have examined it with care—

[Thousands of things are customary, which yet are far from being defensible. See the habits of the world altogether ; its customs, its fashions, its maxims. Will they bear the test of sound wisdom, or endure a scrutiny by the word of God ? Numbers cannot change the qualities of things, and make that to be good which is in itself evil : nor can we be justified in doing any thing merely because it is sanctioned by custom. On the contrary, we are commanded “ not to be conformed to this world,” and “ not to follow a multitude to do evil.”]

2. Not to suffer ourselves to be biassed by any personal interests in forming our judgment of doubtful matters—

[There was a strong temptation to Nehemiah to continue the abuses which had so long obtained : but he suffered not his interest to blind his judgment. So neither should we

* 2 Cor. xi. 7—12. with 1 Thess. ii. 9. and 2 Thess. iii. 8, 9.

practise or connive at any evil, because of its tendency to advance our interests. The whole system of trade, as carried on at this time, is founded, I fear I must say, on fraud; inso-much, that if a person, in any line of business, were to do nothing which would not bear the test of truth and uprightness, he would not be able to maintain his ground; so universally do the profits in trade arise from some kind or other of falsehood and imposition. But the generality of men see no evil in this state of things: they can adulterate their commodities, and practise impositions without any remorse. The things are only such as custom sanctions; and such as, men will say, necessity requires; and therefore they go on, without ever inquiring into the lawfulness of them in the sight of God. But it were surely better to examine into this matter, and to judge righteous judgment; because we know that the judgment of God will certainly be according to truth. We are told by God himself, and that repeatedly, that "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death^b:" and surely it were wise to ascertain with care the correctness of our sentiments, lest we then detect the evil of them, when, alas! the discovery will be of no avail.]

3. Not to fear condemning what our conscience does not approve—

[Though the persons who had practised the evil were the governors of the nation, Nehemiah boldly bore his testimony against them: "Thus and thus did they: *but so did not I.*" Similar fortitude should we also manifest, especially in a way of *holy practice*. If we blame any thing in others, let us at least be careful to do it, not so much in a way of harsh censure, as of better example. This we shall do, if we really fear God. Instead of "walking after the course of this world," we shall endeavour to be "as lights in the world, holding forth in our life and conversation the word of life," that "others, beholding our light, may glorify our Father that is in heaven." If our singularity be complained of, we must remember the issue of Noah's fidelity; and must console ourselves with the thought, that we shall ultimately be saved from that deluge, which will soon overwhelm the whole ungodly world. We shall bear in remembrance, that "we have been bought with a price," even with the inestimable price of the Redeemer's blood; and we shall make it the one object of our lives to "glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his."]

^b Prov. xiv. 12. and xvi. 25.

CCCCXLII.

NEHEMIAH'S FIRMNESS.

Neh. vi. 3, 4. *I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner.*

NEVER can we be sufficiently thankful for the records which are given us respecting the saints of old. When we are put into arduous circumstances ourselves, and see the line of conduct which is required of us, we are ready to think that the requisition is impracticable. But when we behold others, in similar circumstances, approving themselves faithful to their God, we are encouraged, and emboldened to undertake whatever may come before us in the path of duty. Nehemiah, having received from the Persian monarch authority to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, addressed himself to the work with zeal and diligence. But he was not suffered to proceed any long time unmolested in his career. A conspiracy was formed against him, and every effort which malignity could suggest was used to impede him in his sacred course. How he baffled the attempts of his enemies we are told in the passage now before us: from whence I shall take occasion to shew,

I. What efforts men will make to divert us from the service of our God—

It may be asked, What have we to do with the facts which are here recorded? I answer, They were all of a typical nature, intended to shadow forth the opposition which would be made to the cause of God in every age. The city of our God is erecting continually; and the builders are continually obstructed in their work by the enemies of our God and his Christ: and, as in the instance before us, those enemies will endeavour to prevail,

1. By artifice—

[Four different times did Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arabian propose to Nehemiah some artifice whereby they might ensnare him to his destruction. And every species of device will the enemies of Christ contrive and execute, to divert his servants from the duties in which they are engaged. Proposals, in appearance the most friendly, shall be made, to draw them aside, and to ensnare their feet. Those who never took any interest about them in their unconverted state, will now express great anxiety to recover them from their supposed errors, and to restore them to the ways which they have forsaken — — —]

2. By intimidation—

[Parents and governors, who never offered so much as a word of advice to us to serve and honour God, will interpose their authority to keep us from serving him, the *very instant* that we should shew ourselves on the Lord's side. Even at this present hour, notwithstanding the liberality which men profess on the subject of toleration, it is no uncommon thing for those who are possessed of power to use their influence, in an arbitrary and tyrannical way, for the suppression of religion: and the more nearly they are related to us, the more decided will they be in their efforts: "our greatest foes will generally be those of our own household" — — —]

3. By ridicule—

[This is a weapon capable of being used by all: and all will have recourse to it, in order to expose to derision the most sacred characters. The enemies of Nehemiah ridiculed his efforts, saying, that "if but a fox should run up the wall which the Jews were constructing, he would throw it down." Thus will every thing that can bring odium upon us be reported concerning our principles and conduct: nor will any rank in society, any eminence of attainments, any wisdom of deportment, or any purity of manners, screen us from the envenomed shafts of ridicule and contempt — — —]

But in the example of this holy man we see,

II. In what manner we should withstand them—

Two things in particular I would notice:

1. His wisdom—

[He saw through the veil by which these hypocrites sought to cover their designs: but he forbore to bring any accusation against them, lest he should only inflame and irritate their minds, which he wished rather to soothe and to compose. But he appealed to them respecting the importance of prosecuting

without intermission the work in which he was engaged: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

And are not *we* "doing a great work?" What, in the whole world, can be compared with that in which we are engaged, and on which an eternity of happiness or misery altogether depends? — — — If it be said, that a compliance with the habits of the world will not impede our spiritual progress, I utterly deny it: for if that be the case, why are we forbidden to be conformed to this world^a? Why is it said, that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him^b?" What truth would there be in this assertion, that the friendship of the world is enmity against God; and that whosoever even desires to be the friend of the world, he is thereby constituted the "enemy of God^c?" The person who duly improves "the cross of Christ, is crucified to the world^d." To "serve God and mammon" too is impossible^e: and therefore the answer of Nehemiah is exactly suitable for us: "Why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" — — —]

2. His firmness—

[Four different times did these crafty enemies renew their attempts; and Nehemiah answered them continually to the same effect. He would not enter into disputations with them, but contented himself with such an answer as they could most easily appreciate, and such an one as ought to satisfy their minds. Thus it becomes us also to act. However frequent or continued the efforts of men are to turn us from God, we must withstand them all: and it will be well to keep in our stronghold, and not to descend into the field of controversy with them. Here is a plain fact, which they easily comprehend, and cannot possibly deny: the work of salvation is, beyond all comparison, more important than any other that can be proposed to us; and nothing under heaven ought to be suffered to interfere with it. This is so plain and acknowledged a truth, that no one can withstand it. Men may dispute about the principles of the Gospel; but this admits of no dispute. Here, therefore, we should do well to take our stand; and, by whomsoever we are assaulted, to maintain our ground. An appeal, so made, must at last carry conviction with it, and silence our most inveterate opposers.]

Let us learn from hence,

1. What we are to expect, if we will serve our God—

^a Rom. xii. 2. ^b 1 John ii. 15, 16. ^c James iv. 4. The Greek.
^d Gal. vi. 14. ^e Matt. vi. 24.

["All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." It is in vain to imagine that we shall escape. Ungodly men hate the light as much as ever: and as, in the days of Ishmael, he who was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now, and ever will be, as long as there shall be an ungodly man upon earth. If, then, you will set yourselves to serve the Lord, prepare your souls for temptation^f — — —]

2. How we must act, if we will approve ourselves to him—

[We must yield to no artifice, no intimidation whatever. Whether persons come to us in the garb of friends or of foes, our plain answer must be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye^g." If we "love even life itself" in comparison of Christ, "we shall lose it" for ever^h: "We must be faithful unto death, if ever we would attain a crown of life" — — —]

^f Eccl. ii. 1.

^g Acts iv. 19.

^h Matt. x. 39.

ⁱ Rev. ii. 10.

CCCCXLIII.

CHRISTIAN FIRMNESS.

Neh. vi. 11. *And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.*

WHOEVER examines the character of the primitive saints, will see, without fail, how religion dignifies and ennobles the mind of man. It gives to its possessor a superiority above all the common interests of time and sense, and enables him, under the most trying circumstances, to act as in the immediate presence of his God. His efforts to honour God will necessarily involve him in difficulties: but these difficulties will only elicit his true character, and display the efficacy of the grace he has received.

Nehemiah had engaged in the arduous work of rebuilding Jerusalem. In this he was opposed by the enemies of the Jews, who sought, by every artifice, to weaken his hands, and divert him from his purpose. At last a person, from whom he might have hoped

better things, Shemaiah by name, and who, it should seem, professed himself a prophet, concurred with his enemies in a plot against him, and, under a specious plea of consulting his safety, proposed to hold converse with him in the temple, where he would be out of the reach of those who sought his life. But Nehemiah, either suspecting treachery, or, at all events, seeing what advantage such a measure would give to his enemies to reproach him for cowardice, and for a distrust of God, indignantly rejected the proposal in the terms which I have just read.

Now, without confining myself to this particular occurrence, I will take occasion from it to set before you,

I. The subtlety with which our great adversary will assault us—

You cannot but see how specious was the proposal made to Nehemiah. It was an undoubted fact, that his enemies sought his life: and to go into the temple for safety seemed a very prudent measure. But it was a temptation cast in his way by the enemies of God. And thus, our great adversary endeavours to take advantage of us in a great variety of ways, if by any means he may prevail upon us to act in a way unworthy of the Christian character. He will propose to us,

1. To neglect our social duties, with a view to the furtherance of our spiritual welfare—

[*This is a common temptation; and extremely specious. For, who can doubt the superior importance of eternal things above those which are merely temporal? Consequently, it may be thought that the less important duties may give way to those which are of paramount consideration. Thus many, especially in younger life, will vindicate their neglect of those offices which their station in society has imposed upon them, thinking it a sufficient excuse to say that they were seeking the advancement of their eternal interests. The apprentice or the servant will be attending upon religious ordinances in public or private, when he should be executing the business of his own particular calling; imagining that his zeal for the one employment will justify his neglect of the other. Nor is it uncommon for students to inquire, whether their desire to*

qualify themselves for the ministerial office by one line of study will not justify their neglect of those studies which their collegiate course marks out for them, and academic discipline indispensably requires. But all such desires are founded in error. They proceed on the idea that our social and religious duties oppose each other; whereas activity in temporal concerns will not at all abate or interfere with fervour of spirit in the Lord's service^a: on the contrary, in discharging our duty to man, we do, in fact, fulfil our duty to God: and whilst, in relation to one set of duties, we say, "These ought ye to have done," we must with equal decision add, in reference to the other, "These ye are not to leave undone^b."

2. To conform to the world, with a view to conciliate their regard—

[This also is specious, and very commonly proposed. But it is as erroneous as the former; for, however much we may conform to the world, we can never draw them to the love of true religion: on the contrary, we shall rather confirm them in their persuasion, that religion does not require that measure of spirituality which the saints of old maintained. Our Lord says; "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you^c." But, whilst he here acknowledges that a conformity with them will disarm a measure of their enmity, does he recommend the adoption of such a plan? No: he inculcates the very reverse. Whether men will hate us or not, our walk must be the same: we must not accommodate ourselves to their wishes, but to God's commands: and he says, "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed in the renewing of your minds, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God^d."]]

3. To use undue means with a view to the attainment of some desirable end—

[Safety was desirable to Nehemiah: but, to secrete himself in the temple was not a right method of obtaining it. Such a step would have argued a distrust of God's power to preserve him in the way of duty, and would have given great occasion of triumph to his enemies^e. Thus there may be many objects which may be desirable in themselves, which yet we must not seek by any sacrifice of duty or conscience. Let it be granted, that there is some great danger to be avoided, or some valuable blessing, say, the preservation of life itself,

^a See Rom. xii. 11. ^b Luke xi. 42. ^c John xv. 19.

^d Rom. xii. 2. ^e ver. 13.

to be acquired; still the maintenance of strict integrity and of a good conscience must be preferred: nor must we suffer ourselves to be diverted so much as an hair's breadth from the line of duty, for the attainment of any object under heaven. Uzzah has taught us this. To keep the ark from falling was good: but he, not being a Levite, had no right to touch it: and God, in striking him dead upon the spot, has shewn us, that, on no occasion whatever, are we at liberty to "do evil, that good may come^f." Our answer to every temptation must be, "Shall I go into the temple to save my life? I will not go in."]

The greater the subtlety of Satan is, the greater should be our vigilance, and the more immovable.

II. The firmness with which we should resist him—

The direction given us is, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you^g." And, as a pattern of firmness, we cannot have a better example than that before us: "Shall such a man as I flee?" a man invested with authority? a man engaged for the Lord? a man in whom any act of cowardice will be productive of the most injurious effects? "I will not go into the temple, even though it be to save my life." Now, thus should we set the Lord ever before us; bearing fully in mind,

1. Our relation to him—

[Shall such a man as I yield to temptation of any kind? I, a servant of the living God? I, who profess myself to be a child of God? Nothing shall ever induce me to violate my duty to my heavenly Father, or to walk in any respect unsuitably to the relation I bear to him. God helping me, I will walk worthy of my high calling: and whoever he be that would seduce me from my duty, even though he were my dearest friend, I will spurn at his advice with honest indignation, and reject it with the utmost abhorrence^h.]

2. Our obligations to him—

[What do I owe to Almighty God, who gave his only-begotten Son to die for me, and to reconcile me to himself by his vicarious sacrifice upon the cross? And shall I, for any temporal advantage, offend his Divine Majesty? Shall I distrust his care of me, or be afraid to suffer for his sake? Abhorred be the thought! Let me only know the path of duty;

^f Rom. iii. 8.

^g James iv. 7.

^h Gen. xxxix. 9.

and no consideration under heaven shall divert me from it. Let those who know nothing of redeeming love please themselves, if they will: but so will not I: I will strive only to please my God, and to "render unto the Lord according to the benefits he has conferred upon me."]

3. Our expectations from him—

[Here am I, not only a candidate for heaven, but, through grace, an expectant of it. I see crowns and kingdoms reserved for me in a better world. And shall I cast them all away? What carnal gratification can ever be put in competition with the glory that is prepared for me? or what temporary gain be weighed in the balance against an everlasting inheritance? Tell me of what dangers you will, they shall not appal my spirit; and tell me of what joys you will, they shall never allure my soul. For eternity I have been begotten, redeemed, and sanctified; and for eternity alone will I both live and die.]

4. The interest which God himself has in the whole of our conduct—

[This in particular pressed on the mind of this eminent saint. He saw that his enemies laboured to draw him into sin, that they might have occasion for reproach against him, and might cast reflections upon God himself. And, under this conviction, he would risk life itself rather than comply with the solicitations of his friend. And thus it is that God's enemies endeavour to beguile us, in order that they may triumph over us, and exult in our shame. Only let them draw us into sin of any kind, and they will immediately exclaim, "There, there, so would we have it:" yea, if they can prevail to the extent they would, they will even "blaspheme the very name of God on our account." But who, that is aware of this, will not rather die than dishonour God? If we only consider how God's honour is involved in our conduct, we shall need no other motive for steadfastness in his holy ways: and if tempted to leave them, even for a moment, we shall reply, "Shall a man, situated as I am, be driven from his post, and go into the temple to save his life? No: I will not go in: nor shall all the powers of earth or hell ever induce me to relax my diligence in the service of my God."]

What, then, shall I say to you, my Brethren?
THIS I SAY,

1. Expect temptation—

[In the Book of Ecclesiasticus this advice is given: "My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for

temptation^l." You must not expect that Satan will suffer his vassals to cast off his yoke, without many earnest endeavours to reduce them to their former bondage. And he has "wiles and devices" innumerable, whereby to assault our souls. He can even put on the aspect of an angel of light, in order the more effectually to beguile unstable souls^k. He will even make use of your own friends, yea, and of pious persons too, to draw you aside from the path of duty. It was no other than Peter, the bold and zealous Peter, whom he instigated to dissuade our blessed Lord from subjecting himself to the pains which were necessary for the redemption of a ruined world. But our Lord withstood him, saying to this favoured disciple, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men^l." So be ye also on your guard not to follow implicitly the advice even of good men; but weigh every sentiment in the balance of the sanctuary, and conform yourselves in every thing to the mind and will of God.]

2. In every circumstance place your entire confidence in God—

[This was Nehemiah's excellence. He knew in whom he had believed; and that, whatever conspiracies might be formed against him, he was safe in God's hands; "nor could any weapon that was formed against him prosper." Thus then do ye. "Say not, A confederacy to all them that say a confederacy: neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid: but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread^m." *This* your holy profession indispensably requires. When Ezra went from Babylon to Jerusalem with all the vessels of gold and silver which had been carried thither by Nebuchadnezzar, and was in danger of being plundered by robbers who infested the road, "he was ashamed to ask from Artaxerxes a guard of soldiers for his protection; for, says he, I had said to the king, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake himⁿ." And do not ye profess the same truth, that God is the protector, and friend, and portion of all that seek him? Whom then will ye fear? or what will ye desire for your comfort, when ye have such an all-sufficient Friend ever at hand? "If He be for you, who can be against you^o?" or, if He be your Shepherd, what can you want^p? Only "be strong in

^l Eccl. ii. 1.

^k 2 Cor. xi. 14.

^l Matt. xvi. 23.

^m Isai. viii. 12, 13. See also Ps. xi. 1—4.

ⁿ Ezra viii. 22.

^o Rom. viii. 31.

^p Ps. xxiii. 1.

faith, giving glory to God;" and "you shall be kept in perfect peace;" "nor shall so much as a hair of your head perish." Your trials may be multiplied to the most fearful extent: but "you shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end."]

CCCCXLIV.

THE EXPEDITION WITH WHICH THE WALL OF JERUSALEM
WAS BUILT.

Neh. vi. 15. *So the wall was finished . . . in fifty and two days.*

A MERE historic record of the time occupied in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem appears at first sight to be an uninteresting subject for a popular discourse: but it will be found replete with interest, when the circumstances connected with it are taken into the account. The extremely dilapidated and ruined state of the fortifications at that time, the weakness and poverty of those who undertook to rebuild them, and the opposition which they met with from numerous and potent enemies, combine to render the record in our text almost incredible. For the completion of such a work, two and fifty *weeks* would have been a very short time; but two and fifty *days* seem utterly insufficient for it: such expedition appears perfectly beyond the physical powers of the persons engaged in it: yet in that time the wall was finished: and it will be very profitable to inquire,

I. How it was completed in so short a time—

To enter fully into the subject, the six first chapters of this book should be carefully read. In them we shall find that the means whereby this great work was accomplished, were,

1. The wisdom and energy of the governor—

[In every step which Nehemiah took, we are struck with his consummate *wisdom*. When first he made known to the Persian monarch his desire to undertake the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he kept out of sight every consideration which might tend to create jealousy in the monarch's mind, and

mentioned only such as were likely to produce in him a favourable impression. With this view he speaks of Jerusalem, not as the city of the great God, which had been so great and powerful in former times, and was yet ordained of God to become the capital of an independent nation, but simply, as "the city of his fathers' sepulchres^a."

Having obtained permission to execute his purpose, and come to Jerusalem for that end, he again shewed his wisdom in concealing from the people the reason of his journey, till he had personally himself inspected the walls, and was thereby qualified to obviate all objections which indifference or despondency might suggest^b.

The way in which he counteracted all the plots of his enemies, still further marked the depth and solidity of his judgment. He forbore to use any irritating expressions, notwithstanding the multiplied provocations which he met with: and whilst his enemies wasted their time in plotting how to arrest his progress, he occupied himself in the prosecution of his work, augmenting his exertions in proportion as they increased their efforts to impede him^c. Yet it is worthy of particular observation, that he neither trusted to his own exertions, nor yet neglected them under an idea that he should be protected by his God: but he combined a dependence on God with a diligent use of all proper means of self-defence^d; thereby setting us an example which we shall do well to follow in every difficulty which we may be called to encounter.

Nor was the *energy* of Nehemiah less admirable than his wisdom: we see throughout the whole of his conduct as much promptitude as consisted with sound discretion, and an invincible firmness in executing whatever his deliberate judgment had dictated. So intent was he on the prosecution of his purpose, that neither he, nor those under his immediate influence, ever put off their clothes for several weeks together, except for the purpose of their being washed^e. And when a proposal was made to him to hold a conference with some adversaries in an adjacent village, his reply was, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" Yea, when the same message was sent four times, he repeated the same answer: and when at the fifth time it was accompanied with a letter containing many accusations against him, he contented himself with exposing the falsehood of them, and more determinately than ever besought the Lord to strengthen his hands for the work in which he was engaged^f.

^a Neh. ii. 5.

^b Neh. ii. 12—18.

^c Neh. ii. 19, 20. and iv. 8, 9, 13, 14.

^d Neh. iv. 9.

^e Neh. iv. 23.

^f Neh. vi. 2, 3.

^g Neh. vi. 5—9.

On the failure of that device, his enemies sought to intimidate him by reports of a conspiracy against his life, and advised him to take refuge in the temple: but he, with a fortitude worthy of his high character, answered, "Should such a man as I flee? And who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in^b." It is in connexion with this anecdote that our text informs us, "So the wall was built in fifty and two days:" and certainly to this extraordinary combination of wisdom and energy in him we must ascribe it, that the wall was erected in so short a time.]

2. The union and perseverance of the people—

[An individual, however good and great, can do little, unless he is seconded by those who are under his direction: but in this case Nehemiah found instruments well fitted to his hands. No sooner did he make known to the rulers of Jerusalem the commission which he had received from the king of Persia, and call for their assistance in the execution of it, than they said, "Let us rise up and build:" and "immediately they strengthened their hands for this good workⁱ."

It is true, there were some exceptions, some who were too proud and fond of ease to work^k; and others, who yielded to despondency^l; and others who actually carried on a treasonable correspondence with Nehemiah's most inveterate enemies^m: but, on the other hand, there was such a zeal amongst the great mass of the people, that some performed double the work allotted themⁿ, and even ladies of the highest rank combined their utmost efforts to assist in building the wall, not accounting any service either derogatory to their honour, or unsuited to their sex, if they might but encourage their brethren, and advance the glory of their God^o. And to this *union* is the success expressly ascribed: "So built we the wall; for the people had a mind to work^p."

There was also among them astonishing *perseverance*: for when they were menaced with a sudden assault, and were told ten times over, that an armed host would come suddenly upon them to destroy them, they persisted resolutely in their work, arming themselves for their defence, setting alternate watches for their preservation, and working with a trowel, as it were, in the one hand, and a sword in the other, determining rather to sacrifice their lives, than be deterred from the service in which they had embarked^q. Had they yielded to indolence or fear, the work could never have been carried forward: but by

^b Neh. vi. 10, 11.

ⁱ Neh. ii. 17—19.

^k Neh. iii. 5.

^l Neh. iv. 10.

^m Neh. vi. 17—19.

ⁿ Neh. iii. 5, 27.

^o Neh. iii. 12.

^p Neh. iv. 6.

^q Neh. iv. 11—13, 16—18, 21.

this zealous co-operation of all ranks and orders among them, all difficulties were overcome, and the wall was built with an expedition almost incredible.]

3. The peculiar blessing of their God—

[To this above all must the success be ultimately ascribed; for to this were owing the desire of Nehemiah to rebuild the wall^r, the consent of Artaxerxes to the plan proposed^s, the wisdom and energy with which Nehemiah was inspired^t, the cordial co-operation of so many people, and the defeating of all the plots which were devised to retard the work^u. Even the very enemies themselves were so convinced that the work exceeded all the power of man, that they were constrained to acknowledge God himself as the author of it^x, since none but God could have carried them through such labours, or delivered them from such perils, or given a successful issue to such hopeless exertions.

It is of infinite importance that we notice this; for otherwise we shall be ready to give to the creature the honour that is due to God only. Throughout the whole work, application was made to God for his direction and blessing: it was not undertaken without prayer^y, nor carried on without prayer^z; but a reliance was placed on God as an all-sufficient Helper^a; and he shewed himself worthy of the confidence reposed on him: he shewed that “none who trust in Him shall ever be confounded.”]

Having thus traced Nehemiah's success to its true cause, we proceed to set before you,

II. The important lesson which we are to learn from it—

We might with great propriety direct your attention to those wonderful events which occupy the attention of the public at the present hour^b: for certainly, whether we consider the union which has been produced amongst all the allied powers, or the wisdom and energy with which their efforts have been combined, or the rapid and complete success with which their labours have been crowned, there never was an occurrence which more strongly

^r Neh. ii. 12. ^s Neh. i. 11. with ii. 4, 8. ^t Neh. ii. 18.

^u Neh. iv. 15. ^x Neh. iv. 1—3. with vi. 16.

^y Neh. i. 4—11. ^z Neh. ii. 4. and iv. 4, 5, 9. and vi. 9, 14.

^a Neh. ii. 20.

^b June 23, 1814, a day or two after peace had been proclaimed.

marked the hand of God, or more strictly corresponded with that which we have been considering, than that which we now commemorate, the re-establishment of peace amongst all the powers of Europe. We may almost literally say, in reference to it, "The wall has been built in fifty and two days."

But we will direct your attention rather to that which will be of importance, not to the present age only, but to all people to the end of time.

Behold, then, *in what way we should all engage in the Lord's work*—

[To every man in the universe is a work assigned, namely, To erect an house that shall be an everlasting habitation for our God. The walls of Jerusalem reduced to heaps of rubbish do but faintly represent the desperate state of the world around us; whilst the number and malice of those who obstructed the rebuilding of that wall give us a very inadequate idea of the enemies with whom we have to contend whilst executing the work which God has given us to do. Every one indeed must *begin at home*, and *work before his own door*^c; for it is by getting the work of God advanced in our own souls that we shall best contribute to the good of the Church around us. But in the whole of our work we must cultivate *wisdom*. It is lamentable to reflect how often men defeat their own purposes by not attending to the counsels of wisdom. Many give great advantage to their adversaries by not considering what is the peculiar line of conduct which the particular time and circumstances call for, and how they may best overcome the difficulties with which they are surrounded. We are told to "walk in wisdom towards them that are without," and to unite "the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove:" and it is of absolute and indispensable necessity that we attend to these directions, if we would walk honourably before God ourselves, or be instrumental to the advancing of his work in the souls of others — — —

But to wisdom we must add *energy*. There is no time to be lost: "Whatever our hand findeth to do, we must do it with all our might." We must be "fervent in spirit whilst serving the Lord:" and, if any one would divert us from our purpose, or tempt us to relax our diligence, we must make this our uniform and steady answer, "I am doing a great work, and cannot come down" — — —

In this kind of conduct there should be an *union* amongst us all; ministers and people should all work together: yea, and

^c Neh. iii. 10, 23, 28, 30.

women also should engage in the good work; for they, in their place and station, may be as helpful as any. Even the Apostles owed much to the labours of women^d; and the most eminent ministers have been helped forward by their pious and well-regulated zeal^e. Let all of us then be of one heart and one mind in relation to this great matter; for it is surprising how much more rapidly the work of God advances in the souls of men, where many are engaged in strengthening each other's hands, and in encouraging one another's hearts. There are a thousand works which may be carried on in concert, which an insulated individual can never accomplish: and whoever engages in such works for the good of others, will find that he himself is the most profited by his own exertions: "Whilst watering others, his own soul will be watered" also — — —

Nor must we draw back through fear or weariness. We must be men of *fortitude and self-denial*. We should scarcely find time, as it were, for relaxation, any further than absolute necessity requires: and if menaced with assaults, we should put on the panoply of God, and stand ready for the contest: and if by a temporary desertion of our post we may even preserve our lives, we should be willing rather to lay down our lives than dishonour our God by cowardice in his service — — — "Should such a man as I flee?" must be our answer to every suggestion of our great adversary, and to every unbelieving fear that may arise in our own hearts — — —

But above all, we must go forward in *dependence on God*. He must teach us, and guide us, and prosper us, in all our way. "Without him we can do nothing:" but, on the other hand, "through Christ strengthening us we can do all things." We need not despond on account of the greatness of the work, nor be discouraged through the number and malignity of our enemies: "if God be for us, none can effectually be against us:" "He will perfect that which concerneth us," and "carry on to the end the work he has begun." If only we "be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, he has pledged himself to us, that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord" — — —]

^d Rom. xvi. 1—4, 12.^e Acts xviii. 26.

CCCCXLV.

EFFECT OF EZRA'S PREACHING.

Neh. viii. 5, 6. *And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: and Ezra blessed the*
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Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

THOUGH in the time of our Lord it was the custom to read the law of God in the synagogues, it does not appear to have been any regular part of the priest's office to preach unto the people. On some occasions however we find persons sent through the land of Israel to make known the law; and here we behold Ezra, on a pulpit of wood, elevated above the people, and surrounded by an immense congregation, who had come together on purpose to hear the word of God expounded to them. Since the introduction of Christianity, the preaching of the Gospel to men has been the particular office assigned to men who are set apart for that purpose: and though we must chiefly look to the Apostles as our examples, and to the effects of their ministrations as the pattern of what we may expect to see amongst our auditors, yet may we profitably look back to the time of Ezra to learn from him and his ministry,

I. In what manner the word of God should be *dispensed*—

The mode adopted by Ezra, namely, the expounding of Scripture*, we conceive to be peculiarly worthy of imitation. It is indeed but little practised at the present day, though at the time of the Reformation it generally obtained: and it has very great advantages above the plan which has superseded it.

1. It leads the people into a better acquaintance with the Scriptures—

[The Scriptures, except as a book for children, are but little read: persons are discouraged from perusing them by an idea that they are unintelligible to common capacities. But a very little explanation would render them, for the most part, easy to be understood by all. And what a vast advantage would this be! The people studying the word of God at home would be abundantly better qualified to understand it when

* ver. 8.

read in public; and the explanations given to them in public, would enable them to study it to better purpose at home: whereas the present plan of taking only a small passage for a motto, or merely as a ground-work for some general observations, leads to an extreme neglect of the Holy Scriptures, and to a consequent ignorance of them among all classes of the community.]

2. It brings every part of the sacred records into view—

[There are some who bring forward the doctrinal part of Scripture exclusively, and leave the practical part entirely out of sight: there are others who insist only on the practical parts, and leave out the doctrinal. There are some also to whom many of the doctrines contained in the sacred volume are perfectly hateful; and who never in all their lives so much as mentioned the doctrines of predestination and election, but to explain them away, and to abuse the persons who maintained them. But by expounding whole books of Scripture, every doctrine must be noticed in its turn, and the connexion between them and our practice must be pointed out. True it is, that this mode of preaching would not altogether exclude false doctrine; but it would render the establishment of errors more difficult, because the hearers would be able to judge, in some good measure, how far the true and legitimate sense of Scripture was given, and how far it was perverted. The benefit of this therefore cannot be too highly appreciated.]

3. It brings home truth to the conscience with more authority—

[The word of man, though true, has little weight, in comparison of the word of God: "*that* is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword." It is inconceivable what an advantage a preacher has, when he can say, "Thus saith THE LORD:" then every doctrine demands the obedience of faith, and every precept the obedience of righteousness. When told that the word which is delivered to them will judge them in the last day, the people will not dare to trifle with it, as they will with the declarations of fallible men. Were this matter more attentively considered, we have no doubt but that more frequent appeals would be made to Scripture in our public harangues; and that the obsolete method of expounding Scripture would have at least some measure of that attention which it deserves^b.]

^b This part of the subject, *as addressed to Ministers*, is deserving of much fuller notice, than it could receive as addressed to a common congregation.

But, in considering the word of God as explained to the people of Jerusalem, we are more particularly led to notice,

II. In what manner it should be *heard*—

Truly admirable was the conduct of the people on this occasion. Observe,

1. Their reverential awe—

[When Ezra opened the book of God, all the people, in token of their reverence, stood up: and when he blessed God for giving them so rich a treasure, they “all with uplifted hands cried, Amen, Amen;” yea, “they bowed their heads also, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.” This was a deportment which became sinners in the presence of their God: they did not look to the creature, but to God, whose voice they heard, and whose authority they acknowledged, in every word that was spoken. What a contrast does this form with the manner in which the word of God is heard amongst us! How rarely do we find persons duly impressed with a sense of their obligation to God for giving them a revelation of his will! How rarely do men at this day look through the preacher unto God, and hear *God* speaking to them by the voice of his servants! Even religious people are far from attending the ministration of the word in the spirit and temper that they ought: curiosity, fondness for novelties, and attachment to some particular preacher, too often supply the place of those better feelings by which men ought to be actuated in their attendance on the preached Gospel. To “stand in awe of God’s word,” and “to tremble at it,” are far more suitable emotions, than those which we usually see around us. The Lord grant, that our duty in this respect may be more justly estimated, and more generally performed!]

2. Their devout affections—

[“When the people heard the words of the law, they all wept,” as feeling that they had sinned greatly against it^c. And, when they were reminded, that, as the design of the present feast was to bring to their view the tender mercies of their God, and to encourage them to expect all manner of blessings at his hands, they ought rather to rejoice^d, they did rejoice, insomuch that “there was very great gladness” amongst them^e: and they rejoiced especially on this account, that “they had understood the words that had been declared unto them^f.” Now it is in this way that we should hear the word delivered

^c ver. 9.

^d ver. 10, 11.

^e ver. 17.

^f ver. 12.

to us. When it shews us our sins, we should weep, as it were in dust and ashes : and when it sets forth the exceeding great and precious promises of the Gospel, we should rejoice, yea, "rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified." We should have our hearts rightly attuned, so that we should never want a string to vibrate to every touch of God's blessed word. But may it not be said to the generality in the present day, "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented?" Yes; the Gospel has little more power over the affections of men than if it were "a cunningly devised fable." But we entreat you to consider, that, if the law, when expounded, was so powerful, much more should the Gospel be, since "it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."]

3. Their unreserved obedience—

[No sooner was it discovered that an ordinance, appointed by Moses, had been neglected, than they hastened to observe it according to the strict letter of the law, and actually did observe it with greater fidelity than it ever had been observed even from the days of Joshua to that present hour^s. This shewed, that the impression made on their affections was deep and spiritual. And it is in this way that we also must improve the ministration of the word. If we attend to the Gospel as we ought to do, we shall find out many things which we have neglected, and many that we have done amiss: yea, many things which are not generally noticed even among the godly, will occur to our minds, and shew us the defectiveness, not of our obedience only, but of the obedience of the best of men. Let us have our minds then open to conviction, and attentive to every commandment of our God. Nor let us be satisfied with paying only a customary attention to his revealed will, but let us aspire after higher degrees of purity, and a more perfect conformity to the divine image. This will serve as the best test of our sincerity, and it will shew, that neither have you heard in vain, nor we dispensed his word in vain.]

^s ver. 13—18.

CCCCXLVI.

THE JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH.

Neh. viii. 10. *The joy of the Lord is your strength.*

THE preaching of God's word is a very ancient ordinance. In the context we have a description of the manner in which Nehemiah conducted it. These

means of instruction were useful in that day; nor are they less necessary in every place and age. People need, not only reproof for what is wrong, but direction in what is right. The Jews wept bitterly at the hearing of the law; but Nehemiah corrected their sorrow as ill-timed, and exhorted them to rejoice in God, who had done so great things for them.

Let us observe,

I. What reason we have to rejoice in the Lord—

God is often said to rejoice over his people^a; but the joy here spoken of must be understood rather of that which we feel in the recollection of God's goodness towards us.

The Jews at that season had special cause for joy in God—

[They had been miraculously delivered from Babylon. This temple had been rebuilt in twenty years, and the worship of God restored; and now, after seventy years more, the wall of the city was finished. They had been enabled to surmount innumerable difficulties^b: they had prospered, even to a miracle, in their endeavours^c. These were tokens of the divine favour, and pledges of its continuance. They were therefore called upon to rejoice with gratitude and confidence: nor was their sorrow, however just, to exclude this joy.]

Such reason also have all the Lord's people to rejoice in the Lord—

[They have experienced a redemption from sorer captivity, and been delivered by more stupendous means — — — Every day's preservation too from their numerous enemies is, as it were, a miracle; yet the work of their souls is carried on in spite of enemies, yea, *is expedited through the means used to defeat it*. Surely then they should say, like the Church of old, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad^d." Moreover, these mercies are pledges to them, and earnest of yet richer blessings. They may well confide in so good and gracious a God. They have indeed still great cause for sorrow on account of their past violations of the law; yet is it their duty to rejoice, yea to "*rejoice always in the Lord^e*."]]

^a Zeph. iii. 17.

^b Neh. iv. 17.

^c Neh. vi. 16.

^d Ps. cxxvi. 3.

^e Phil. iv. 4.

To promote and encourage this, we proceed to shew,

II. In what respects this joy is our strength—

We are as dependent on the frame of our minds as on the state of our bodies. Joy in God produces very important effects :

1. It disposes for action—

[Fear and sorrow depress and overwhelm the soul^f: they enervate and benumb all our faculties; they keep us from attending to any encouraging considerations^g; they disable us from extending relief to others^h; they indispose us for the most necessary dutiesⁱ. We cannot pray, or speak, or do any thing with pleasure. On the contrary, a joyous frame exhilarates the soul^k. David well knew the effect it would produce^l: and every one may safely adopt his resolution, “I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart^m.”]

2. It qualifies for suffering—

[When the spirit is oppressed, the smallest trial is a burthen. In those seasons we are apt to fret and murmur both against God and man. We consider our trials as the effects of divine *wrath*; or, overlooking God, we vent our indignation against the instruments he uses. But when the soul is joyous, afflictions appear lightⁿ. How little did Paul and Silas regard their imprisonment^o! How willing was Paul to lay down his very life for Christ^p! This accords with the experience of every true Christian^q.]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us not be always brooding over our corruptions—

[Seasonable sorrows ought not to be discouraged; but we should never lose sight of all that God has done for us. It is our privilege to walk joyfully before the Lord^r. If we abounded more in praise, we should more frequently be crowned with victory^s.]

^f Isai. lvii. 16.

^g Exod. vi. 9.

^h Job ii. 13.

ⁱ Luke xxii. 45.

^k Prov. xvii. 22.

^l Ps. li. 12, 13.

^m Ps. cxix. 32.

ⁿ Heb. x. 34. and xii. 2.

^o Acts xvi. 25.

^p Acts xx. 24.

^q Rom. v. 2, 3. and 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^r Ps. cxxxviii. 5. and cxlix. 5. and lxxxix. 15, 16.

^s 2 Chron. xx. 21, 22.

2. Let us, however, carefully guard against the fresh incursions of sin—

[It is sin that hides the Lord from our eyes^t. Joy will not consist with indulged sin^u. Let us then “mortify our earthly members,” and our besetting sins. Let us be girt with our armour, whilst we work with our hands^x — — — Nor ever grieve the Holy Spirit, lest we provoke him to depart from us.]

3. Let us be daily going to God *through Christ*—

[If ever we rejoice in God at all, it must be through the Lord Jesus Christ^y. It is through Christ alone that our past violations of the law can be forgiven^z. It is through Christ alone that the good work can be perfected in our hearts^a. And, since “all things are *through* him, and *from* him, let them be *to* him also^b.”]

^t Isai. lix. 2.

^u Ps. lxvi. 18.

^x Neh. iv. 17, 18.

^y Rom. v. 11.

^z Col. i. 20.

^a Heb. xii. 2.

^b Rom. xi. 36.

ESTHER.

CCCCXLVII.

HAMAN'S MURDEROUS PROPOSAL.

Esther iii. 8, 9. *And Haman said unto King Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed.*

REVENGE is cruel: but never more cruel than when it has its foundation in mortified pride. In the passage before us, it is carried to an almost incredible extent. Haman occupied the highest post of honour, next to the royal family, in the Assyrian empire. All the subjects in the kingdom bowed down to him. But there was a poor man, one Mordecai, who sat at the king's gate, and consequently was often passed by Haman, who refused to pay him this homage. At this neglect, Haman was grievously offended. He deemed it an insufferable insult, which could be expiated only by the death of the offender. On inquiring into Mordecai's habits and connexions, Haman found that he was a Jew: and, conceiving probably that this contemptuous spirit pervaded that whole nation, and accounting it a small matter to sacrifice the life of one single individual, he determined, if possible, to destroy the whole nation at once; and, accordingly, he made this proposal to King Ahasuerus, engaging from his own resources to make up to the king's treasury whatever loss might arise to the revenue from the proposed measure.

Now this proposal appearing, at first sight, so very extraordinary, I will endeavour to set before you,

I. The commonness of it—

In every age of the world have God's people been hated, for the very reasons that are here assigned—

[“ Their laws are diverse from those of all other people, neither keep they the laws of the kingdoms where they dwell.” This is true in part. They worship the one true and living God; and obey his laws, which are unknown to the rest of the world, or, at all events, unheeded by them. Of course, whatever laws are inconsistent with the laws of God, they disobey; because they owe to Jehovah a paramount duty of allegiance, and are bound to “obey God rather than men.” On this account they are hated, reviled, persecuted: and, on many occasions, if man could have prevailed, they would have been utterly extirpated. David tells us of confederacies formed for this very purpose by all the nations around Jerusalem, each saying to the others, “Come, let us cut off the Jews from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance^a.” So, in the early ages of Christianity, there were not less than ten strenuous efforts made to attain this object. And at different periods since that time has persecution raged to the utmost extent, to destroy, if possible, all real piety from the face of the earth. How “drunk the Roman Church has been with the blood of the saints,” has been often seen, and would be seen again, if she could regain the power which she once possessed^b. She cannot endure that God should be served in opposition to her, and that his laws should be regarded as of superior authority to hers.]

But we need not go back to former ages for an elucidation of this truth—

[Behold any person at this time cordially embracing the faith of Christ, and conforming in all things to his revealed will; and it will soon be found that the same enmity still reigns in the hearts of men against the people of God, as at any former age. True, the cruelties of martyrdom are stayed; but private animosity is indulged as far as the laws of the land wherein we live will admit; and every person who thoroughly devotes himself to God, is made to feel its baneful influence. St. Paul, speaking of Ishmael and Isaac, says, in reference to his own time, “As he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now^c.” thus also must I say at this time. Our blessed

^a Ps. lxxxiii. 3—8.

^b Rev. xvii. 6.

^c Gal. iv. 29.

Lord told us, that "he came not to send peace on earth, but a sword; for that he came to set the nearest and dearest relatives at variance with each other^d." (Not that this was the *intent*, though unhappily it is the *effect*, of his Gospel.) And thus it is, wherever the Gospel is preached with power. There is immediately "a division among the people;" and those who are "obedient to the faith" become objects of hatred and persecution to those who "rebel against the light:" so true is that saying of the Apostle, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution^e."

Passing over the inhumanity of this proposal, as being too obvious to be insisted on, I proceed to notice,

II. The impiety of it—

The very accusation brought against the Jews by Haman shews what is the real ground of enmity against the Lord's people: it is, that they serve God, whilst the rest of the world bow down to idols; and that, in this determination of theirs, they inflexibly adhere to the dictates of their own conscience. This is universal amongst all the people of the Lord—

[The man that turns aside from the path of duty, through fear of man's displeasure, has no title whatever to be numbered amongst the children of God. If we fear man, the fear of God is not in us^f. We must be willing to lay down our life for the Lord, or else we can never be acknowledged as his disciples^g — — — And this inflexibility we must carry into every part of our duty — — —]

But this preference of God to man is the very thing which gives the offence—

[Where man's laws and customs are contrary to those of God, man expects and demands submission to his will, rather than to the oracles of God: and if we will not comply with his requisitions, he will use all possible means to compel us. But what is this, but a direct rebellion against God, and an usurpation of his authority? It is, in fact, a contest with God, whether *He* shall govern the universe, or they. Look at all the Prophets and Apostles, and see what was the ground of the world's opposition to them. They were ambassadors from God to men; and they were living examples of all that they proclaimed. Hence they were regarded as "the troublers

^d Matt. x. 34—36.

^f Luke xii. 4, 5.

^e 2 Tim. iii. 12.

^g Matt. x. 37—39.

of Israel," and were represented as enemies to the governments under which they lived^b. It was this adherence to God's laws that involved the Hebrew youths and Daniel in the calamities inflicted on them; and that subjected all the Apostles, with one only exception, to the pains and penalties of martyrdom. Hence, when Saul breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples, our Lord addressed him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?" And hence he has declared, in reference to all his persecuted people throughout the world, "He that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth Him that sent me¹."]

And this leads me to shew,

III. The folly of it—

Can it be thought that such feeble worms as we shall be able to prevail against Almighty God?

[Hear how God derides the vain attempt: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed; saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion^k." So said our blessed Lord to Saul also; "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks¹." The truth is, that "the Lord Jesus holds all his stars in his right hand^m;" and it is impossible for any man to pluck them thenceⁿ. "Their life is hid with Christ in God^o:" who, then, shall get access to it, to destroy it? Haman, with all his power, could not prevail against the Jews, who yet, in appearance, were altogether in his hands. The whole power of the Roman empire, by whomsoever wielded, could not root out the disciples of the Christian Church: "nor shall the gates of hell ever prevail" against the weakest of God's faithful people^p; for "HE will keep them even as the apple of his eye^q," and "perfect in every one of them the work he has begun^r," and "keep them by his own power through faith unto everlasting salvation^s." However "they may be sifted, not one grain from amongst them shall ever fall upon the

^b Compare Ezra iv. 13. with Acts xvi. 20, 21. and xvii. 6, 7. and xxiv. 5. and xxviii. 22.

¹ Luke x. 16.

^k Ps. ii. 1—6.

^l Acts ix. 5.

^m Rev. ii. 1.

ⁿ John x. 28, 29.

^o Col. iii. 3.

^p Matt. xvi. 18.

^q Deut. xxxii. 10.

^r Phil. i. 6.

^s 1 Pet. i. 5.

earth^t." Hypocrites may turn apostates: but of "those who were really given him of the Father, our blessed Lord never has lost, nor ever will, so much as one^u" — — —]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are the objects of the world's hatred—

[Realize the promises which God has given^x — — — and then say, "Shall I be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be as grass, and forget the Lord my Maker?" Dear Brethren, know that "He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world;" and that, if you confide in Him, "no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper."

We have said, that it is *on account of your peculiarities* that you are hated. But *let not those peculiarities be carried into matters of mere indifference*. If to love and serve God, as Elijah did, render you peculiar, then must you, like Elijah, dare to be singular in the midst of an ungodly world. You are not to leave "the narrow path that leadeth unto life, and to go into the broad road that leadeth to destruction," to compliment or please any man under heaven. In matters that are indifferent I am far from recommending an undue stiffness or singularity: but in relation to every thing substantial, such as living a life of faith on the Lord Jesus, and confessing him openly before men, and devoting yourselves altogether to his service, I say, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

2. Those who are unhappily prejudiced against the Lord's people—

[If you cannot see with their eyes, do not endeavour to make them see with yours, unless in a way of sober argumentation, and of candid reference to the word of God. To have recourse to derision or persecution of any kind will only involve your own souls in yet deeper guilt than you already lie under for rejecting the Gospel of Christ: and our blessed Lord warns you, that "it were better for you to have a millstone hanged about your neck, and be cast into the sea, than that you should offend one of his little ones." This is the advice I would give you: Search the Scriptures, to see what were the principles by which all the Prophets and Apostles were actuated, and what was the course of their lives: and then

^t Amos ix. 9.

^u John xvii. 12.

^x Isai. xxxiii. 16, 20—22. and xli. 11—16. ^y Isai. li. 12, 13.

compare with them the principles and practice of God's people now: and if you find, as you will, a general agreement amongst them, though, alas! with a sad disparity in point of actual attainment amongst those of the present day, beware how you imitate the unbelievers of former ages, in opposing the work of God in others: for, if you do not succeed, you only fight against God for nought; and if you do succeed, you will perish under the accumulated guilt of destroying the souls of others; for assuredly "their blood will be required at your hands."]

CCCCXLVIII.

THE FEAST OF PURIM.

Esther ix. 27, 28. *The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year; and that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed.*

IT has been observed of the Book of Esther, that the name of God is not in it: and certainly there is not the same strain of piety pervading it as is found in the Book of Nehemiah. This perhaps may be accounted for from the circumstance of its having been written in the court of Persia, where Jehovah, the God of Israel, was not known or acknowledged. But though in this point of view it may appear more like to a mere record of facts, it does in reality contain as striking a display of God's providence as any book in the inspired volume. In explaining the feast of Purim, spoken of in our text, we must of necessity bring before you all the most leading facts recorded in the whole book; though we shall of course notice them only so far as they throw light on our main subject.

We shall consider,

I. The feast itself—

It is called the feast of Purim, in reference to a lot which was cast (the word *Pur* signifying a lot),

and which had a very principal effect in the preservation of all the Jewish people throughout the Persian dominions. But in speaking of the feast, we will distinctly state,

1. The occasion on which it was instituted—

[Haman, the prime minister and favourite of King Ahasuerus, was offended with Mordecai a Jew, who had refused to pay him that homage which the king had enjoined to be paid him by all his courtiers. Indignant at this supposed insult, Haman sought to avenge himself, not on Mordecai alone, but on all the Jews throughout the empire. For this end, he cast a lot to determine on what day he should execute this design against them; and, having fixed the day in his own mind, obtained an order from the king that every one of them, old and young, women and children, should be put to death, and their property be delivered over as a prey to their destroyers. The Jews, informed of the edict, betook themselves to fasting and prayer: and God, in answer to their prayer, wrought a wonderful deliverance for them, and enabled them to execute upon their enemies the very evils which they themselves had been previously doomed to suffer*. It might have been expected indeed, when the king, at the request of Esther, had given liberty to the Jews to stand in their own defence, that their enemies would have abstained from any attempt against them, more especially when it was seen that the rulers of the different provinces favoured the Jews: but, as Haman had been hanged on the very gallows which he had erected for Mordecai, and thus had fallen the first sacrifice to his own devices, his surviving friends were determined at their own peril to carry into execution his cruel design: but God so strengthened the Jews, that they prevailed in the contest, and slew in one day no less than seventy-five thousand of their enemies, besides five hundred in the very palace of Shushan, and, on the day following, three hundred more. In commemoration of this glorious event, the feast of Purim was instituted: and from that day to the present hour it is kept, wherever there is a body of Jews to join in the celebration of it.]

2. The manner of its observance—

[We doubt not but that it was observed *with pious gratitude*: for though nothing is spoken of that, we may be well assured that the same piety which had enjoined a fast of three days to obtain the blessing, enjoined thanksgivings also, when the blessing was obtained.

But it was to be celebrated also *with festive mirth*. This is

* ver. 1.

by no means incompatible with pious exercises, or unfit to be united with them on such an occasion as that. God himself had ordered three great feasts to be annually kept, in remembrance of his mercies; the feast of the passover, in remembrance of the deliverance of the Jewish first-born from the sword of the destroying angel; the feast of weeks, in remembrance of the promulgation of the Law from Mount Sinai; and the feast of tabernacles, in remembrance of their dwelling in tents in the wilderness^b: and these sufficiently shew that our animal nature may participate in the joys which belong more particularly to our higher and better part, provided we keep within the strict rules of temperance, and *enjoy the Donor in his gifts*.

A special direction also was given, that the feast should be kept *with active benevolence*: the richer were not only to send portions to each other, but to provide for the poor also, who could not otherwise be partakers of the general joy. This was a very essential part of the institution, and highly proper to be observed; since we ought then more particularly to shew love to our brethren, when we are commemorating God's love to us. This union of piety, festivity, and love, may be seen in the feast which Nehemiah made for the people, when Ezra expounded to them the law of God^c: and it were to be wished that *we*, in the feasts instituted for the commemoration of still richer blessings, were careful never to separate what God in his ordinances has so plainly joined together.]

The very particular injunctions given by Esther, and Mordecai, and all the principal Jews, respecting the perpetual observance of this feast, lead us naturally to inquire into,

II. The ends and reasons for which it was appointed—

It doubtless was designed,

1. As a memorial of God's goodness to them—

[It was right to keep up, as far as possible, the remembrance of this mercy to all future generations. We are but too apt to forget the goodness of God to us: and we need occasional observances commemorative of them, in order to revive in our minds the impressions, which the first communication of his blessings excited in us. It was on this principle that God appointed a number of days to be kept holy under the Law; and for the same end is the ordinance of the Lord's supper appointed under the Gospel; "Do this in remembrance of me: for as oft as ye shall eat this bread and drink this cup,

^b Deut. xvi. 16.

^c Neh. viii. 10, 12.

ye do shew forth the Lord's death, till he come." On the same principle the Fathers of our Church have set apart certain days for the special contemplation of those mysteries, on which the salvation of the whole world depends; the incarnation, the death, the resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. In truth, the Jews in all ages are equally interested in this event; since, if the design of Haman had been carried into effect, the whole posterity of all the Jews in that immense empire would have been cut off in one day: and consequently they, as much as their remoter ancestors, are bound to "keep God's great goodness to them ever in remembrance."]

2. As an incentive to love and serve him—

[Commandments have but little effect, where love does not exist towards the authority that enjoined them. It is love alone that will constrain us to a willing and unreserved obedience even to God himself. Hence St. Paul urges us "by the mercies of God to yield ourselves as living sacrifices unto him;" for it is a sense of them only that will enable us to regard such a surrender of ourselves to him as "a reasonable service^d." Now certainly the contemplation of this great deliverance could not but deeply affect the hearts of all, and stir them up to glorify their adorable Benefactor. And though, alas! at this time the feast is made only an occasion of intemperance amongst all who observe it, yet it ought to excite far other sentiments than those of carnal mirth, and to stimulate to far other conduct than that of riot and excess.]

3. As an encouragement to trust in God—

[In this view it may well be a feast to the whole world. For where can we find, except in the history of Joseph, so striking an exhibition of the ways of Providence, as in the history before us? Even long before the wicked thought was conceived in the heart of Haman did God in a most singular manner exalt Esther to the throne, that she might be able to counteract and defeat his purpose: and he enabled Mordecai also to detect and reveal a conspiracy against the life of the monarch, that he might afterwards have the influence that was necessary for the final preservation of the Jewish people. When Haman had conceived the purpose, he superstitiously "cast a lot from month to month, and from day to day," to determine the best time for carrying it into effect: and behold God, "with whom alone the disposal of the lot rests," so ordered it, that the lot should fall on the very last month, and on the thirteenth day of that month; so that there was abundant time for making the people sensible of their danger, and for

^d Rom. xii. 1.

accomplishing their deliverance. That the king should have a sleepless night might appear a very trivial accident; yet in the divine counsels it was an important link in the chain of his purposes, since it led to the exaltation of Mordecai at the very moment when Haman was prepared to put him to death. In a word, the courage with which Esther was inspired to go in, uncalled for, to the king, the readiness of the king to hear and answer her requests, the versatility of the courtiers, the jealousy of the king, together with many other circumstances, all led to the immediate overthrow of Haman, and the consequent deliverance of the Jewish people. How remarkable was it, that Haman himself, and afterwards his ten sons also, should be hanged on that very gallows which had been prepared by Haman for Mordecai; and that, instead of the Jews being put to death, they by the king's own authority should destroy seventy-five thousand of their enemies, besides eight hundred in the very palace of the king! All this shews, how impossible it is to fight successfully against God, and how safe they are, who put their trust under the shadow of his wings. Truly, if God be for us, we need not be concerned how many there may be against us; for "mightier is He that is in us, than he that is in the world." Only let us trust in him, and not a hair of our head shall perish.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who make a profession of religion—

[You must expect, as in the days of old, that the "enmity which exists between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman" will yet shew itself, and that "they who are born after the flesh will persecute those who are born after the Spirit." As you differ from the world in the laws which you obey, and in the habits you maintain, you must expect to be represented by them as enemies both to the Church and State*. But commit your cause to God, and he will preserve you. Your enemies may rage; but "no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper." There is an efficacy in fervent prayer, that shall bring Omnipotence to our aid: and though your trials may be great and of long continuance, yet shall they issue in more abundant joy to you, and honour to your God.]

2. To those who shew hostility to the people of God—

[You little think whom it is that you revile and persecute: "He that hateth you hateth ME," says our Lord; and again, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME?" The people of God are regarded by him as "his first-fruits," which, being the

* Esther iii. 8.

Lord's property, no man was at liberty to consume: be assured therefore, that "all who shall devour them will offend; (i. e. will stumble;) and evil will come upon them^f." It were "better for you to have a millstone put about your neck, and to be cast into the sea, than that you should offend one of his little ones." Let the history before us suffice to shew you, that "whoso toucheth them, toucheth the apple of Jehovah's eye."]

3. To those who in the midst of a persecuting world have been preserved—

[Know to whom you owe it, that you have not been given up as a prey into the hands of your enemies. The agency of God's providence is secret, so that you behold it not: but you reap the benefit of it, and will at a future day see as striking interpositions in your favour as those which are recorded in the history before us. Go on then, serving the Lord without fear, and multiply your services for him as he multiplies his mercies unto you.]

^f Jer. ii. 3.

J O B.

CCCCXLIX.

JOB'S ANXIETY FOR HIS CHILDREN.

Job i. 5. *And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.*

WHO Job was, or at what precise period he lived, or who wrote the book that is called by his name, is not certainly known. It is probable that he was a descendant of Nahor, Abraham's brother^a, and that he lived previous to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, because there does not appear to be any direct reference to that event, which there would in all probability have been, if it had taken place, and Job or his friends had been acquainted with it. The Book of Job, with the exception of the two first chapters, and part of the last, is written in verse; and this has given occasion to some to imagine, that the whole book is a kind of poetic fiction: but there undoubtedly was such a man as Job^b; and the events referred to in the Book of Job did actually occur^c; and the record of them was most assuredly inspired^d. Though therefore we admit that the conversation which passed between him and his friends is not

^a Gen. xxii. 20, 21.

^b Ezek. xiv. 14.

^c Jam. v. 11.

^d It is referred to by St. Paul in this view. Compare Job v. 13. with 1 Cor. iii. 19.

recorded in the precise words used by the different speakers, yet it is certain that the *substance* of their respective speeches is correctly given, and that the record of them was written under the direction of God himself; so that it is, as much as any other part of the inspired volume, the word of God. The *scope* of the book must be clearly understood, and be borne in mind throughout; for, if we lose sight of that, the whole will be a mass of confusion. The friends of Job conceived, that his extraordinary calamities proved that his former professions of piety had been hypocritical: and Job maintained, that the trials which a man might be called to endure were no just criterion whereby to judge of his state; since the most upright of men might be deeply afflicted, and the most ungodly of men might enjoy uninterrupted ease and prosperity. And it will be found in the sequel, that, though Job in some instances was unguarded in his expressions, his views on the whole were right, and those of his friends erroneous. But we must not therefore conclude, that his friends uttered nothing that was good: their general sentiments were just; but their application of them to Job's particular case was incorrect: their premises were often right; but their conclusions wrong. Their great error was, that they thought such extraordinary dispensations of God's providence towards a man must be sent on account of some extraordinary wickedness committed by him. Conceiving themselves to be correct in this, they concluded Job to have been a hypocrite, and that God had now exposed his hypocrisy to the view of all: and Job, on the contrary, maintained that he had been upright in all his conduct, and that the judgment of his friends was uncharitable, erroneous, and wicked.

But it is not our intention to enter any further into the general question between Job and his friends at present: we have now only to consider the private character of Job, and *that* more particularly in reference to his family. He is represented as a man of most eminent piety, as being "perfect and upright,

and one that feared God and eschewed evil*:" and from what is said of him in our text, he evidently deserved that high character. Let us consider then,

I. His conduct in relation to his family—

God had blessed him with a numerous family, whom he had reared to manhood, and placed around him with separate establishments. But, notwithstanding he had thus liberally provided for them, and was evidently most indulgent towards them, (promoting to the uttermost a brotherly union among them, and permitting his daughters to enliven the innocent conviviality of their domestic circles,) he was exceeding watchful and jealous over their eternal interests. His seven sons had been entertaining each other in succession: and, though Job knew not that any thing contrary to God's will had passed amongst them, yet, conceiving it possible that they might in their mirth have been transported too far, he called them to prepare themselves for a solemn attendance upon God, whilst he should offer for every one of them a burnt-offering unto the Lord.

Now consider this as an act,

1. Of magisterial authority—

[It is manifest that he was, if not a king, yet a magistrate, possessing very high authority, and occupied to a great extent in judicial proceedings': yet he did not therefore think himself at liberty to neglect religion, or to confine his attention to private duties: he felt that the more exalted his station was, the greater was his responsibility, and the more urgent his duty to honour God before men. What a blessing would it be, if all people of wealth and dignity would use their influence in this way! But the generality of great men think there is no need for *them* to stand forth as patrons and patterns of religion: they suppose they have a dispensation from such open acts of piety as would attract observation, and make them appear particular; and that, if they countenance by their presence the public institutions of religion, it is quite as much as can be required at their hands. But we must declare to all, that, if Job, with the small measure of light which he enjoyed, accounted it his duty to exert all his

* ver. 1.

† Job xxix. 5—10.

influence for the honour of his God, much more should we, who profess to have received the full light of the Gospel, feel it our duty to devote all our faculties and all our talents to the honour of Christ, and the extension of his kingdom upon earth.]

2. Of parental love—

[Many who have been careful of their children in their earlier days, cast off all concern about them, or at least decline all interference with them as to religious matters, when they have arrived at years of discretion. But so did not Job: though he was an indulgent parent, he did not give up all parental authority, but sought to use it for the eternal welfare of his children. He called them all to self-examination and prayer, previous to his offering for them the sacrifices in which he commanded them to join^s. Yea, we are told, "Thus he did continually;" continually watching over their eternal interests, and using all his influence, both with them and with God, to bring them to the enjoyment of the divine favour. In this he is a pattern for parents in every age, and in every place. As long as God shall continue to them the possession of their intellects, so long should they improve their authority for the enforcing of an attention to religious duties, and for the cultivating of a spirit of piety in the hearts of their children.]

The peculiarity of his conduct naturally leads us to inquire into,

II. The grounds and reasons of it—

Had any great evil been committed by his sons, to call forth that particular exercise of parental authority, we should have ascribed to that the conduct of this holy man: but, as no evil existed but in his apprehensions, we must look for the grounds of his conduct in some general views and principles to which it is to be traced. It was founded in Job's views of,

1. The extreme depravity of our nature—

[Though he had trained up his children in pious principles, he knew that they were by nature prone to evil, and that there was not any sin which, if left to themselves, they might not commit. He knew that they might even go so far as to speak lightly of God and his dispensations, whether of providence or

^s This is the meaning of the word "sanctified." See Exod. xix. 10, 14.

grace; yea, through an evil heart of unbelief they might depart from God altogether, and actually renounce their allegiance to him. Hence he was desirous to obtain mercy for them, that, if they should have committed so great a sin, they might be brought back again to repentance, and not be left to perish for ever in their iniquity.

Now in this respect the views of Job were just: for the heart of man by nature is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;" and, whatever education he may have received, and whatever eminence in piety he may have attained, he has reason to pray, "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not!" yea, he has reason to fear, "lest, having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away." And every person in the universe should bear this in mind, in reference both to himself and others: for it is "God alone that is able to keep us from falling," and it is only whilst "he holds us up that we can be safe."]

2. The corrupt tendency of carnal mirth—

[Mirth may be very innocently enjoyed: but there is great danger, especially when indulged to any extent, that it may become an occasion of evil. It certainly tends to stupify the conscience, and to deaden our affections towards God. When we are rejoicing much in earthly things, we are apt to languish in our desire of heavenly things; and to feel less ardent longings for the glory that shall be revealed. Moreover, when "we are full, there is danger lest we deny God, and say, Who is the Lord^h?" It was against this that God cautioned his people of oldⁱ, and this effect Job saw as likely to be produced in his own children. Hence he called them to a particular recollection of their spirit and conduct during their days of feasting: he urged them to examine well their own hearts, and to implore help from God, that they might be enabled to discover any secret evil which might have lurked in their bosoms. Now in this he set an admirable example unto us. The world is apt to fascinate our carnal hearts; and it is extremely difficult to "use the world without abusing it." Whenever therefore we have been mixing in its company and participating of its pleasures, it becomes us carefully to examine our own hearts, lest we should have offended God by our forgetfulness of him, or contracted any stain that may render us odious in his sight.]

3. The universal need of an atonement—

[Had Job offered one burnt-offering for them all, it would have sufficed to shew them what judgments they merited at

^h Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

ⁱ Deut. viii. 10, 11.

the hands of God, and that nothing but the Great Sacrifice could ever avert his wrath from them; but when he offered a separate burnt-offering for each of them, these lessons were inculcated with double force. In truth, whether the young men had transgressed, or not, to the extent that their father feared, it was still necessary that they should apply to the blood of atonement to cleanse them from their sins. We need one to "bear the iniquity of our holiest actions," and much more to expiate the guilt which we contract in an hour of conviviality and mirth: "Without shedding of blood there can be no remission" of any sin whatever: and a most important lesson we shall learn from this history, if we take occasion from it to get this truth deeply impressed upon our hearts.]

Let us LEARN from hence,

1. To exercise a jealousy over ourselves—

[If it was right in Job to be jealous over his sons, it must surely be right for all to maintain a similar disposition in reference to themselves: nor is it only after a season of conviviality that we should exercise it, but at all times. Not a day should pass without diligent self-examination how we have passed our time, and how we have performed our several duties in the world, the family, and the closet; what tempers we have manifested towards man, and what affections we have exercised towards God. Have we received every thing, whether good or evil, as from him, and endeavoured to enjoy him in our comforts and to bless him for all our trials? In a word, let us especially inquire from time to time whether we have under all circumstances walked as in his immediate presence, and laboured to glorify his great and glorious name? "This, like Job, we should do continually:" and, like him also, we should occasionally set apart a day for more than ordinary self-examination, for deep humiliation on account of our innumerable short-comings and defects, and for a more earnest application to the blood of our Great Sacrifice to expiate the guilt of all sins, whether deliberate or unintentional, whether known or unknown.]

2. To seek above all things the eternal welfare of our children—

[It is undoubtedly a parent's duty to seek the comfortable settlement of his children in some good and useful occupation: but it is his duty also to seek above all things the salvation of their souls. Consider, ye who have families, that from you has been transmitted to your children a corrupt nature, which, if not changed by divine grace, will hurry them on to everlasting

perdition. Surely then ye are bound to seek this grace for them: ye are bound to pray for them night and day: ye are bound to restrain them also, and to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord^k." Nor is it only in their earlier years that you are thus to watch over them, but in after life: and if you neglect to do so, you will involve *yourselves* in the deepest guilt, and be justly answerable for *them* in the day of judgment: "their blood will be justly required at your hands." In particular, be careful to instil into their minds high and reverential thoughts of God, and adoring gratitude to Christ for the atonement which he has made for sin and sinners. Teach them to go to that Saviour continually, and to wash in the fountain of his blood, which alone can cleanse them from their sins. Thus, whatever may be the issue of your labours with respect to them, you will stand acquitted in your own conscience, and have a testimony from God in the last day that you have done the things which were pleasing in his sight; "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."⁷

^k 1 Sam. iii. 13.

CCCCCL.

UNCHARITABLE JUDGMENT REPROVED.

Job i. 9. *Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?*

WELL has it been asked, "Who can stand before envy?" This vile principle is as ingenious as it is malignant. Never is it at a loss for an occasion to display its hateful propensities. The very favour of God himself shall call it forth, and cause it to pierce the most innocent of men with its envenomed darts. Especially, if any person be made an object of approbation and applause, its odious qualities will instantly appear in an endeavour, if not to destroy the character of the person applauded, yet at least to reduce it to the standard of ordinary attainments. In the chapter before us, Satan is represented as coming on a particular occasion into the presence of the Most High, and as being asked of God, whether he had considered what an eminently holy character Job was, insomuch "that there was not one like him

upon earth, so perfect, so upright," so altogether conformed to the mind and will of God^a. And what was the answer of this malignant fiend? It was in direct opposition to the divine testimony: "Doth Job fear God for nought?" No: he is a selfish hypocrite, that serves his God only because of the temporal advantages he gains by it: and, if those advantages were withdrawn, he would shew he has no more regard for God than the vilest of mankind; yea, he would even "curse his God to his very face^b."

Now, it is in this very way that envy operates, in reference to the saints, in all ages: they are represented as actuated by far different principles from those which they profess, and as possessing in reality no more of true sanctity than the world around them: "Do they fear God for nought?" No: they have some selfish end in view: and, if they be disappointed in attaining that, they will prove themselves as destitute of any religious principle as those who make no profession of religion.

It was in this sense that Satan put his challenge: and, therefore, we shall first direct our attention to it in that view. But we may take the words without any particular reference to the context; and then they will afford occasion for some observations of a very different nature. In both these views, it is my intention to consider them, and to notice them,

I. As a base accusation, indignantly to be repelled—

How false the accusation was, in reference to Job, the event proved: nor is it a whit more just as thrown out against the people of God in all ages. I grant there are, and ever have been, *some*, who are not upright before God. A Judas was amongst the immediate disciples of our Lord; and a Simon Magus amongst the early converts of his Apostles. But if there be *some* like Orpah, who cleaved to Naomi in her prosperity, but abandoned her when her name was changed to Marah, (when, from being "*pleasant*,"

^a ver. 6.—8

^b ver. 9—11.

her very existence became "*bitter*,") so are there many who, under all circumstances, "cleave unto the Lord," and adopt the resolution of pious Ruth : "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me^c."

And why should their motives be called in question?

[Is earthly prosperity so generally the portion of the godly, that hypocrites should be induced by the prospect of it to profess themselves the people of the Lord? For one, that is led by a *hope* of honour or emolument to *embrace* the religion of Christ, there are ten, at the least, who are *deterred from professing it*, by a *fear* of injuring their respectability or interests. Indeed, we are taught, by our blessed Lord, that "we must forsake all to follow him;" and, consequently, a desire after the loaves and fishes cannot reasonably be imputed to the general mass of Christians as their motive for professing godliness. We must look for other motives: and other motives there are, abundantly sufficient to produce the effects which we ascribe to them.

Are we not immortal beings, and accountable to Almighty God for the whole of our conduct? And is not the thought of this sufficient to impress the mind with awe, and to stimulate us to the utmost efforts, if, by any means, we may escape death, and lay hold on eternal life? Has not God also, in tender mercy to our souls, sent unto us his only-begotten Son, to effect our reconciliation with him by the death of the cross? And is not this sufficient to shew us at once the value of our souls, and the necessity of fleeing from the wrath to come? May not such love on the part of our offended God be well expected to operate on our hearts, and to constrain us to devote ourselves altogether unto him? And, whilst our lives accord with our profession, has any one a right to sit in judgment upon our motives? and, when no fault can be found with our *actions*, is any one at liberty to criminate our *intentions*?]

If multitudes of God's people were upright in for-

^c Ruth i. 14—17.

mer ages, why should all who profess themselves his be accounted hypocrites now?

[Were Noah, Daniel, Paul, induced by any sinister motives to serve their God? Did not their whole lives bear testimony to them that they were sincere? And is not the grace of God as sufficient for us as it was for them; so far at least as to inspire us with a holy fear of God, and a desire to serve him with our whole hearts? I may go further, and ask, Whether there be not many, even at this present day, evincing a superiority to all earthly good, and a determination to serve their God, though with the loss of all things? I repel, then, and with indignation too, the base accusations that are so generally brought against the people of God: and I declare, without fear of contradiction, that at this day there are many who, though far inferior to Job in respect of spiritual attainments, resemble him fully in the integrity of their hearts; and many, of whom it may be justly said, They are "Israelites indeed, and without guile."]

But, as detached from the context, the words may be regarded,

II. As an unanswerable truth, most gladly to be conceded—

Selfishness is doubtless an evil, when it leads us to postpone spiritual things to those which are temporal: but, if understood as implying a supreme regard to our eternal interests, it is good and commendable; for it is that very disposition which was exercised by Mary, when she dismissed from her mind all inferior considerations, and chose that good part, which should never be taken away from her. In this sense Christians are selfish; and it may justly be said of them, that "they do not serve God for nought." For,

1. They desire, above all things, the salvation of their souls—

[They know what they have done to offend their God, and what God has done to save them, and what promises of mercy he has given to all who repent and believe his Gospel. And, knowing these things, they desire to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded them, and to secure to themselves the proffered benefits. And is this wrong? If so, what can all the invitations and promises of the Gospel mean? Why

did Peter say, "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out?" or why did our blessed Lord say, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink; and out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water?"]

2. They actually obtain from God many present benefits—

[By "coming to Christ, they find rest unto their souls," and are "filled with peace and joy in believing:" and in this way they are encouraged to "fight the good fight of faith," and to "run with patience the race that is set before them." And is there any thing evil in this? Does it not accord with the experience of the saints in all ages? Yea, does it not constitute a very strong argument in favour of godliness, that "it hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come^d?"]

3. They look forward to infinitely richer benefits in the world that is to come—

[To those who seek after glory and honour and immortality, God has promised eternal life: and the saints, under their most afflictive trials, are pronounced blessed, because of the recompence that awaits them in the eternal world^e. Can it be wrong, then, to have respect to that reward, and to run with a view to obtain the prize? Look at Moses: was not he actuated by this hope, when he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt?" Yes, we are expressly told that "he had respect unto the recompence of the reward^f." By the same hope were the ancient martyrs also actuated, when "they refused to accept deliverance from their tortures, in the assured expectation of obtaining a better resurrection^g." And even of our blessed Lord himself is it said, that "for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross and despised the shame, till at last he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God^h."

Then I confess the truth contained in my text, that we are selfish: and my only complaint is, that we are not sufficiently impressed with these hopes and expectations: for, if we were, we should, like the holy Apostle, "forget all that is behind, and reach forward to that which is before, and press on with continually increasing ardour for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."]

^d 1 Tim. iv. 8.

^e Matt. v. 3—12.

^f Heb. xi. 24—26.

^g Heb. xi. 35,

^h Heb. xii. 2.

To all the calumniated servants of God, then, would I say,

1. Regard not the uncharitable censures of ungodly men—

[Do what you will, they will be sure to find fault with you. Satan accused Job to God as a hypocrite, *because of his prosperity*: and, when he had prevailed to involve him in utter ruin, he stirred up Job's friends to condemn him as an hypocrite, *because of his adversity*. So, when "John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking," Satan's agents said "he had a devil:" and, when "Jesus came eating and drinking," they accused him as "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." Thus, "whether you pipe or mourn," they will find occasion against you, even as they did against David, who, "when he put on sackcloth, and fasted," to bring down blessings on his enemies, had even "that turned to his reproach." Only be careful to give no just occasion of offence. Let your enemies be able to "find no fault in you, except concerning the Law of your God." Let it be the one labour of your life to "be blameless and harmless, as sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, shining amongst them as lights in a dark world, and holding forth, in the whole of your life and conversation, the word of life."]

2. Endeavour in all things to approve yourselves to God—

[A contempt of man's censures should ever be attended with a determination of heart to "keep a conscience void of offence towards both God and man." You have seen what a testimony the heart-searching God bare to Job: seek that he may testify respecting you also, that you are "perfect and upright, fearing God, and eschewing evil." Be men of principle: and then you will be independent of outward things, and serve God as well in one state of life as another. Neither prosperity nor adversity will influence you in this respect; but, "whether God give or take away, you will bless his holy name." Then, if condemned by men, you may look forward with confidence to the future judgment, when "your righteousness shall shine forth as the noon-day," and "every tongue that has spoken against you shall be condemned."]

CCCCLI.

TRIALS AND RESIGNATION OF JOB.

Job i. 20, 21. *Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*

BEHOLD, the invisible world is here opened to our view. We here see an assembly of the sons of God, (whether of angels, or of glorified saints, is not certain,) and Satan himself intruding in among them, in the very presence of their God. We are informed also of a conversation passing between Jehovah and Satan in reference to Job; God commending him as the most eminent of the saints on earth; and Satan traducing his character, as *a mercenary hypocrite*, who would even curse his Maker to his face, if only he should be tempted to do so by a withdrawment of his temporal prosperity. We are told also that God permitted Satan to put the piety of Job to the test which he had proposed.

There would be no inconsistency in this, if we were to interpret it *literally*: but we apprehend that it is a kind of parabolic representation, like that of Micaiah, who saw in a vision a spirit coming into the presence of Jehovah, and proposing to go forth as a lying spirit in the mouth of Ahab's prophets, in order to persuade Ahab to go up to Ramoth-Gilead^a. In this view it is intended to shew us the malignity of Satan, and the restraints imposed upon him by Almighty God, who will suffer him to proceed no further than shall ultimately lead to his own confusion.

In whichever way we take this account, whether literally or mystically, it appears that Satan was permitted to assault Job with the most grievous temptations, and that the piety of Job was victorious in the conflict. In considering this account of Job, we shall notice,

^a 1 Kings xxii. 19—22.

I. His trials—

These were beyond measure great—

[Their *number and variety*; their *rapid succession*, without one moment allowed him for reflection and prayer; the *extent* of them, comprehending the loss not only of all his worldly property, but of all his children, and that too in a *season* of mirth, when he was peculiarly apprehensive that they might be least fit to die; and particularly the *certainly* of all these calamities, every one of them being reported by an eye-witness; all of these coming so *suddenly*, were sufficient to overwhelm any one, more especially when *the hand of God himself* appeared, not in *the language of the reporters* only, but in the events themselves, to have been thus awfully directed against him.]

In them we see,

1. How great the power of Satan is—

[How speedily he found instruments to execute his will! The minds of Sabeans and Chaldeans received in a moment the impulse which he chose to give them; and they performed exactly the service to which he destined them: the time, the manner, the measure of their actions were perfectly subject to his control. The elements also were alike obedient to his command, and performed precisely what he directed them to effect: the lightnings flashed, the winds blew, and, by their ready compliance with his will, proclaimed him to be indeed “the god of this world,” “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in all the children of disobedience.” True it is, he could not have done these things if God had not permitted him: but from what he did we may easily see what he both could and would do, if all restraint were withdrawn from him; and what he will do in the eternal world to those who shall be delivered into his hands.]

2. How uncertain is all worldly good—

[When Job arose in the morning, he was “the richest man in all the east;” and before night he was bereft of all that he possessed. And such changes are by no means unfrequent in the world. Not to mention the restless desires of a gamester, the unfortunate speculations of a merchant, or the misplaced confidence of a surety, (all of which are fruitful sources of misery and ruin,) let us contemplate those other sources of calamity which are more out of the reach of human prudence, such as earthquakes, inundations, shipwrecks, invasions, conflagrations; alas! alas! how many thousands are from time to time reduced by these from a state of ease and opulence to the most abject and destitute condition! Verily there can be no

one so ignorant as not to know, as well from observation as report, that "riches make themselves wings, and fly away."]

3. That the most eminent saints are not exempt from even the heaviest calamities—

[If ever any man could venture to say, "I shall die in my nest^b," it was Job; because, whilst he possessed more wealth than others, he had a mind more under the influence of piety, and consequently more free from those snares and temptations to which others are exposed. Yet, though there was no one like him upon earth in respect of piety, there never was a man so oppressed as he by overwhelming calamities. Let no man then ever venture to say, "My mountain standeth fast; I shall not be moved:" for "all things come alike to all." "Of the righteous in particular the afflictions are many:" as in the case of Job, God often sends troubles to try and prove the sincerity of their faith, to strengthen their graces, to purify their hearts, to display before the world the efficacy of his grace, and to fit his people for a better world. If God have given faith to any, they may expect that it shall "be tried, in order that it may be to the praise and honour and glory of their God at the appearing of Jesus Christ^c."]

But in the midst of all his trials we behold, and admire,

II. His resignation—

He felt, and deeply too, the heavy load of his afflictions; and hence he rent his mantle, and shaved his head, as customary expressions of deep anguish of mind^d. But still he was composed and tranquil, "not charging God foolishly," or uttering any thing hasty or unadvised. Let us notice,

1. The considerations with which he quieted his mind—

[These were two; namely, that what he had lost, was not properly his own; and, that he had taken it, whose property it was. He felt himself now only reduced to the state in which he was when he came into the world, and in which he must at all events soon be, when he should be called to go out of the world again. Why then should he repine and murmur at being stripped of all, when he was so lately, and must

^b Job xxix. 18.

^c 1 Pet. i. 7.

^d Gen. xxxvii. 29, 34. with Job ii. 12. and Isai. xxii. 12. with Mic. i. 16.

so soon again be, altogether naked, without any thing that he could properly call his own? So just and important is this idea, that St. Paul has actually quoted the very words of Job, to shew that "godliness with contentment is the only desirable gain^e."

Moreover, the use and enjoyment of those things had been given him by God alone: whether they came by inheritance, or had been the fruits of his own industry, God was equally the giver of them^f: and, whether men or devils or elements had deprived him of them, they were no other than as instruments in the hand of God, who had accomplished by them his own sovereign will^g. How then could he presume to reply against God? No: "he would be dumb, and not open his mouth, because the Lord had done it."

What astonishing grace was here, that could suggest at a moment such thoughts as these, and give them such an efficacy to compose and tranquillize his soul!

But let us notice more particularly,]

2. The manner in which he expressed his resignation—

[He "fell on the ground and worshipped" his God with the profoundest humility. O what submission of heart was here! How meekly did he receive at the Lord's hands the strokes of his chastening rod! But he went further still, and "blessed the name of the Lord," yea, *blessed* him for that very dispensation which Satan expected to have called forth only the language of *cursing* and blasphemy. Job was convinced in his judgment that "the Judge of all the earth could not but do right;" and that however "clouds and darkness might be round about him, yet judgment and justice were the basis of his throne." He knew that whether he could see the reason of God's dealings now, or not, he should see reason to adore him for them in the eternal world; and therefore he would bless and adore him for them here. Thus did he adopt exactly the line of conduct which God approves; "neither despising the chastening of the Lord, on the one hand, nor fainting under his rebukes," on the other hand^h. He "walked by faith, and not by sight," and excelled all the saints, whether of that or any other age. David was not the least eminent of men; yet when the Amalekites had invaded Ziklag, and taken away his wives and property, "he wept till he had no more power to weepⁱ:" and when he lost his rebellious son Absalom, he so

^e 1 Tim. vi. 7—9.

^f Jam. i. 17.

^g Isai. xlv. 7. Amos iii. 6.

^h Heb. xii. 5.

ⁱ 1 Sam. xxx. 3, 4.

fainted under the loss as to be altogether forgetful of all his mercies, and of all his duties^k. But Job lost not for a moment his self-possession: his principles operated instantly to the full extent that the occasion required: "Shall we receive good at the hands of God," says he, "and shall we not receive evil^l?" Any other conduct appeared to him to be highly unreasonable: and hence he is proposed by God himself as a pattern for our imitation to the end of time^m.]

From contemplating this exalted character, let us
LEARN,

1. To sit loose to earthly things—

[We deny not but that a competency in earthly things is a blessing for which we have great reason to be thankful: but when we see how uncertain the possession of them is, and, above all, how happy we may be in God without them, we have no occasion to covet them, or to set our hearts upon them. St. Paul, when "he had nothing, yet possessed all thingsⁿ," because he had God for his God and portion. Let us in like manner "learn in every state to be content, whether we be full or hungry, whether we abound or suffer need^o." Let us, "if we have a wife, be as though we had none; if we weep, be as if we wept not; if we rejoice, be as if we rejoiced not; if we buy, be as though we possessed not; and altogether use this world as not abusing it, because the fashion of it so quickly passes away^p."]]

2. To stand prepared for trials—

[Truly we know not what a day or an hour may bring forth; what losses we may have in our property, or in our dearest friends and relatives; or what calamities may come upon us. We are sure that "Satan, that roaring lion," is "going to and fro throughout the earth," "seeking whom he may devour:" and, if he have obtained permission to exercise his power against us, how soon may he bring us down to the ground, and even "sift us as wheat!" Who amongst us can have any idea what storms he may be preparing for us, or what instruments he may be stirring up against us? Knowing then his malignity and his power, let us stand upon our guard against him; let us "arm ourselves with the mind that was in Christ Jesus^q;" and let us so endeavour to realize our principles, that we never give way to discontent or impatience, but bless in every thing the name of our God.]]

^k 2 Sam. xix. 4—6.

^l Job ii. 10.

^m Jam. v. 11.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^o Phil. iv. 11, 12.

^p 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

^q 1 Pet. iv. 1.

3. To seek the things which neither men nor devils can take away from us—

[Spiritual blessings are out of the reach of all our enemies: "Our life is hid with Christ in God;" and not all the powers of darkness combined can destroy it. Moth and rust may corrupt our earthly treasures, or thieves may break through and steal them: but if we lay up treasure in heaven, it will be inaccessible to them all. *That* is "*substance*," whilst all else is vanity and vexation of spirit. Let us then "labour for the meat that endureth to everlasting life;" and "choose the good part, that never can be taken away from us."]

† Prov. viii. 21.

CCCCCLII.

FRIENDLY SYMPATHY ILLUSTRATED.

Job ii. 11—13. *Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him. And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.*

JOB in a second conflict had gained the victory: yea, though his wife acted as a confederate with Satan, and urged him to "curse God and die," yet did he retain his integrity, and prove himself worthy of the character which God had given him. But the rumour of his unprecedented calamities had spread far and wide, and had caused all those who should have been a comfort to him to depart from him; insomuch that, having none to administer to his relief, he had "taken a potsherd to scrape himself withal." But three of his aged friends, descendants of Abraham, though not of the chosen seed, still loved and honoured him; and feeling their incompetency, as individuals, to afford him all the instruction and consolation that the occasion called

for, concerted a plan to visit him together, and to unite their efforts for his welfare. An account of their first interview is here set before us; and a most interesting account it is. In discoursing upon it, we shall be led to contemplate,

I. The nature of love—

[Love, as described by St. Paul^a, and as summarily expressed by our blessed Lord^b, is the acting in all things towards our neighbour as we would think it right that he, in a change of circumstances, should act towards us. It makes us to consider all men as members of one great body, and to participate with them in their feelings, as the different members of our own body would with each other^c. If any be afflicted, it prompts us to fly to their relief, and to concert the best measures in our power for their restoration to happiness. In the friends of Job we see the nature of love well exemplified: they did not feel indifferent about him, or run from him, as they did whose hearts were destitute of love; but they met together for the express purpose of participating and alleviating his sorrows. They did this, too, unsolicited, and unsought: it was the fruit of a divine principle within them, the voluntary expression of their own affectionate regards. This was a “love, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth:” it was “a love without dissimulation:” and wherever true love exists, it will produce exactly the same dispositions, and stimulate, according to its measure, to the same exertions.]

In executing their benevolent plan, Job’s friends have shewn us,

II. The effects of sympathy—

[When they were yet at some distance from him, they saw him; but would not have recognised him at all, (so altered was he in his whole appearance,) if they had not been prepared for the change by the reports which they had heard concerning him. But the sight deeply affected them all; so that they burst forth into floods of tears, and rent their mantles, as expressive of their anguish, and sprinkled dust upon their heads towards heaven, as mourners were wont to do^d. On coming into his immediate presence, “they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights,” that is, a considerable part of

^a 1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.

^b Mark xii. 31. Matt. vii. 12.

^c 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.

^d See this whole expression of sorrow exemplified in those who mourned over the destruction of Tyre; Ezek. xxvii. 30, 31.

each successive day^e; and so overwhelmed were they with the sight of his melancholy condition, that none of them could give utterance to their feelings, or attempt to suggest any thing for his relief.

Those who have never known from their own experience how entirely the soul may be overwhelmed with sympathy, conjecture, that during all this time the friends of Job were harbouring suspicions which they did not dare to express. But this idea is very injurious to the character of those holy men, and directly contrary to the account given in our text: for their silence is expressly ascribed to the overpowering effect of their own sympathy at the sight of his unparalleled afflictions; "They spake not, *for* they saw that his grief was very great:" and to this cause it must be ascribed. We know, that as silence is the proper effect of great sorrow^f, (David says, "I am so troubled that I cannot speak^g,") so is it also of deep sympathy; such as the elders of the daughters of Zion experienced, when they saw their city and temple destroyed, their princes and people carried into captivity, the law of their God forgotten, and their prophets no longer favoured with visions from the Lord^h. In a word, the effect of sympathy is, to make the sorrows of another our own; and to produce in our hearts those very feelings of grief and anguish, which the afflicted individual himself is called to sustain.]

The interview, thus illustrated, displays,

III. The excellence of true religion—

[The whole of true religion is comprehended under the term *love*: "Love is the fulfilling of the lawⁱ." Moreover, the sympathy before delineated, is the most unequivocal expression of love: "Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this; To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction^k." See then religion as exemplified in our text, how beautiful does it appear! A carnal mind would admire rather a sight of kings surrounded by their nobles: but God and his holy angels, I have no doubt, esteem such a sight as was exhibited on that occasion, as infinitely grander than all the pomp of courts, yea than of "Solomon in all his glory." Never did our Lord himself appear more glorious, no not even on the mount of transfiguration, than when he was weeping with sympathy at the tomb of Lazarus, or with compassion over the devoted city of Jerusalem. So the sight of these aged

^e See Luke ii. 37. and Acts xx. 31.

^f "Curæ leves loquuntur; ingentes stupent."

^g Ps. lxxvii. 4.

^h Lam. ii. 9—11.

ⁱ Rom. xii. 8—10.

^k Jam. i. 27.

men, assembled to mourn with, and to comfort, their afflicted brother, and expressing in such significant ways their overwhelming sorrow, was as noble and as interesting as can be seen on earth. And O, what would this world be, if every one possessed such a spirit as they evinced! Yet such is the tendency of true religion, which transforms us into the image of that God, whose name and nature is LOVE.]

By way of IMPROVEMENT, we will,

1. Recommend to you the exercise of these dispositions—

[Behold these men, how amiable they appear in all the posture and habiliments of woe! And are they not a fit pattern for you to imitate? But you have a brighter pattern than they, even our Lord Jesus Christ himself; who, when he saw our fallen state, came down from heaven to seek and save us, yea, “though rich, for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich.” O, what marvellous grace was here! and still, “as our Great High-priest, he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been himself in all things tempted like as we are, on purpose that he might succour them that are tempted.” If then the example of Job’s friends be not sufficient to commend to you these lovely dispositions, let me entreat you to seek “the mind that was in Christ.” As a further inducement to this, consider how soon you yourselves may need the compassion and the sympathy of others. There is no man so secure, but he is open to the assaults of trouble on every side. Would you then in trouble have any to sympathize with you? Know, that “he who would have friends must shew himself friendly¹,” and that you must sow the grain which you desire to reap. This is an argument used by God himself, who bids us to “remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them that suffer adversity, as being ourselves also in the body^m.” If any further motive be wanted, consider, that in the day of judgment the exercise of this disposition will be a very principal subject of inquiry, as evincing the sincerity of our love to Christ: and every act of love towards the poorest of his people will be acknowledged by HIM as a favour conferred upon himselfⁿ. Let me then recommend the exercise of love and sympathy to all who would adorn their holy profession now, or be approved of their God in that great and awful day.]

2. Suggest some cautions in relation to it—

[Let not sympathy be shewn with the rich only, or with our own particular friends; but let it be extended to all who

¹ Prov. xviii. 24.

^m Heb. xiii. 3.

ⁿ Matt. xxv. 40.

are in trouble, whether rich or poor, whether known or unknown^o. We deny not but that those who are nearly related to us have a superior claim; as they have also who are of the household of faith^p: but still we must, like the good Samaritan, account every man our neighbour, and gladly avail ourselves of every opportunity of pouring balm into his wounded spirit.

Again, wait not till you are called and summoned to the house of mourning; but go thither of your own accord, esteeming it "far better to go there, than to the house of feasting^q." Let the principle of love in you be like a spring, ever ready to act, the moment that a scope for action is afforded it. "Look not every man on his own things only, but every man also on the things of others^r;" and be ready on all occasions to "rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep^s." This readiness to "bear one another's burthens is a fulfilling of the law of Christ^t."

But lastly, be not hasty to offer advice to those who are bowed down with a weight of trouble. There is a sacredness in grief which demands our reverence; and the very habitation of a mourner must be approached with awe. A hasty effusion even of consolatory truths is offensive to one who is not prepared in a measure for the reception of them. The language of many is, "Look away from me; I will weep bitterly; labour not to comfort me^u:" and to such, an obtrusive officiousness is disgusting. To such, the silent eloquence of sighs and tears is more consolatory than the most copious harangue. See that you yourselves feel deeply; and then you will neither fall into an officious impertinence, on the one hand, nor deem even a silent visit unserviceable, on the other: you will patiently wait for the most favourable season, and administer your instructions as the mourner is able to receive them.]

^o Job xxx. 25.^p Gal. vi. 10.^q Eccl. vii. 2, 4.^r Phil. ii. 4. with 2 Cor. xi. 29.^s Rom. xii. 15.^t Gal. vi. 2.^u Isai. xxii. 4.

CCCCCLIII.

JOB CURSES THE DAY OF HIS BIRTH.

Job iii. 1. *After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day.*

IT is worthy of observation, that the most eminent saints mentioned in the sacred records are reported, not only to have sinned, but to have failed in those very graces for which they were most distinguished.

Abraham, the father of the faithful, who is set forth as the great pattern for all future believers, repeatedly denied his wife through the influence of unbelief: and Moses, the meekest of all men upon the face of the earth, spake unadvisedly with his lips, and thereby provoked God to exclude him from the earthly Canaan. Of the patience of Job the Scripture speaks in the highest terms: but, behold, he is here set forth to our view in a state of grievous impatience. Let us consider,

I. The manner in which he expressed his impatience—

It should seem as if Satan had now assaulted, not his body only, but his soul also, and had succeeded in wounding him with his fiery darts. It is probable too, that the continued silence of his friends had produced an unfavourable impression on his mind. But however these things might be,

He vented his complaints in very unbecoming terms—

[He first cursed the day of his birth, wishing it to be marked, both by God in his providence, and by men in their feelings, as a day of darkness and gloominess, even to the latest generations^a. He next expressed his regret, that he had not been left to perish as soon as he came out of the womb; seeing that he should then have escaped all his calamities, and been quiet in the tomb, where all of every class, whatever their situations and circumstances were whilst they were living upon earth, are enjoying equal repose^b. And, lastly, he complained that whilst his grievous sufferings tormented him beyond measure, they did not prevail to take away his life^c.

We have a similar instance of impatience in another eminent saint, the Prophet Jeremiah, who seems almost to have adopted the very expressions in the chapter before us^d.

Alas! how weak a creature is man when left in any measure to himself!]

But is this an uncommon line of conduct?

[No, truly: there is the same spirit in every man, ready to break forth whenever occasion offers: and in too many of us it breaks forth almost without any occasion at all. How little a thing will discompose the minds of the generality!— — —

^a ver. 3—10.

^b ver. 11—19.

^c ver. 20—26.

^d Jer. xx. 14—18.

How small a provocation will cause them to vent their displeasure in angry and opprobrious language! — — — If trials be at all heavy and of long continuance, how will they disquiet our minds, and destroy all the comfort of our lives! Is it an uncommon thing for men under some calamity to feel weary of their existence, and even to entertain thoughts of terminating their sorrows by suicide? Yea, do not multitudes, who have not one half of Job's trials, actually destroy their own lives, and rush headlong into hell itself, in order to get rid of their present troubles?

Whilst then we lament the imperfections of this holy man, let us turn our eyes inwards, and contemplate the prevalence of our own corruptions, which a single loss, or disappointment, or injury, is sufficient to call forth in their utmost extent.]

Having viewed the impatience of Job, let us notice,

II. Some observations arising from it—

We may justly notice,

1. The folly of arraigning the providence of God—

[Had Job been able to see the design of God in that dispensation towards him, (as sent in the purest love;) and the end in which it was soon to issue, (his greatly augmented happiness and prosperity;) had he contemplated the benefit that was to arise from it to his own soul (both in present sanctification and in eternal glory,) and to the Church of God in all ages, (in having such an example of sufferings and patience set before them,) he would never have uttered such complaints as these: he would have acknowledged then, what he afterwards so clearly saw, that “the Judge of all the earth did right.” Thus if we also in our trials would look to the final issue of them, we should bear them all, whether little or great, with resignation and composure. We see Jacob complaining, “All these things are against me,” and yet at last find, that the loss he so deplored was the salvation of him and all his family: it was a link in the chain of providence to accomplish God's gracious purposes in the preservation of the chosen seed, and ultimately in the redemption of the world, by Him who was to spring from the loins of Judah. And if we saw every thing as God does, we should see that the very trials of which we complain are sent by God as the best means of effecting the everlasting salvation of our souls; and we should unite in the testimony of David, that “God in very faithfulness has caused us to be afflicted.” Let us be contented then to leave every thing to the disposal of an all-wise God: let us in the darkest seasons “possess our souls in patience;” assured,

that "he doeth all things well;" and let us say with Job when in his better mind, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."]

2. The inability of Satan to prevail against the Lord's people—

[Satan had hoped that he should instigate Job to "curse God to his face:" but in this he was disappointed. Job did indeed "curse his *day*;" but never for a moment thought of cursing his *God*. On the contrary, he often spake of God in the most honourable and reverential terms. But Satan is a chained adversary: he can prevail no further than God sees fit to permit him. He could not have done any thing against Job, if he had not first obtained leave of God. Neither can he do any thing against the least of God's people, any further than God is pleased to suffer him with a view to their eternal good. He "desired to sift Peter as wheat:" but the intercession of Christ preserved his servant from being finally overcome. "He is a roaring lion, going about seeking whom he may devour:" but he cannot seize on one of the lambs of Christ's flock. They are kept in safety by the Good Shepherd; and "none can pluck them out of his hand." God has provided for his people, "armour, by means of which they shall be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand." Nor do the more *aged* and experienced alone defeat him; "the *young men* also overcome him^f," yea, all that are begotten of God are enabled so to "resist him, that he flees from them^g," and "toucheth them not^h." He may be permitted to tempt and try usⁱ; but he is a vanquished enemy^k, and "shall be bruised under our feet shortly^l."]

3. The necessity of fleeing from the wrath to come—

[There is a period fast approaching, when all the ungodly will be reduced to a state infinitely more calamitous than that of Job. They will indeed then, and with justice too, "curse the day of their birth;" for it would, as our Lord himself testifies, be "better for them that they had never been born." O what a day of darkness awaits them; a day wherein there will not be one ray of light to cheer their souls! Then will they curse and "blaspheme their God, because of the plagues that he inflicts upon them^m." They will wish for death also, and "call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover themⁿ;" but all in vain. Now if we were informed that only

^e Eph. vi. 10—18.

^f 1 John ii. 13, 14.

^g Jam. iv. 7.

^h 1 John v. 18.

ⁱ Rev. ii. 10.

^k John xii. 31.

^l Rom. xvi. 20.

^m Rev. xvi. 9, 11.

ⁿ Rev. vi. 15—17.

such troubles as Job's were coming upon us, what diligence should we use to avert them! how careful should we be to preserve our property, and to guard against the disorders with which we were threatened! Not a moment would be lost by us, nor should we decline the use of any means, to ward off such awful calamities. How earnest then should we be in fleeing from the wrath to come! Think, Brethren, what a fearful thing it will be to "fall into the hands of the living God," and to "be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone," "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched^o." O delay not one moment to flee for refuge to the hope set before us in the Gospel: flee to Christ, as the city of refuge, where, notwithstanding all your past iniquities, you may find perfect rest and security. Do not put off the great work of your souls to a time of sickness and trouble: such a season is but ill calculated for so great a work. Look at Job: if he had neglected his soul hitherto, how incapable would he have then been of performing those offices of repentance and faith, which require all the energies of the mind! He could not even compose his mind to bear his affliction aright; much less could he have employed that season in calling his past ways to remembrance, and in turning unto God with all his heart. So we also shall find it quite enough to bear up under the pains or weakness of a dying hour. Let us then improve the time of health and prosperity, in preparing for a better world, where neither sin nor sorrow shall molest us more, but we shall be for ever happy in the bosom of our God.]

^o Mark ix. 43—48. with Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

CCCCLIV.

ELIPHAZ REPROVES JOB.

Job iv. 12—19. *Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face: the hair of my flesh stood up: it stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: how much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?*

THE controversy on the part of Job's friends is here begun : and Eliphaz leads the way. He begins with acknowledging Job's former usefulness in alleviating the sorrows of others, but turns it into a ground of accusation against him for not bearing with more fortitude his own sorrows. The testimony however was most honourable to Job : for we can scarcely conceive a more honourable character, than that of one who, possessing all the influence of wealth, and power, and wisdom, employs it all in instructing and comforting the sons and daughters of affliction : and we cannot be surprised, that, when Eliphaz was so well acquainted with the benevolent exertions of Job, he did not in his own conduct pay greater attention to his example. It is evident, that he did not duly estimate the calamities of Job : not feeling them in his own person, he was not aware of their weight and pressure ; else he never could have spoken so lightly of his affliction, as to say, "*It toucheth thee, and thou art troubled ;*" and then to make his confidence a subject of derision. But let us come to the argument with which Eliphaz thought to confound Job ; "*Who ever perished, being innocent ?*" This was the ground on which all Job's friends proceeded : they maintained, that his sufferings were a certain proof of his having committed some enormous wickedness, which God was now punishing. From appealing thus to observation and experience, Eliphaz proceeds to mention a revelation which he had received from heaven, and which, in his opinion, strongly confirmed the sentiments he had delivered. This revelation we shall now consider ;

I. Abstractedly—

The circumstance of so remarkable a vision having been given to Eliphaz, in order to fix his attention the more deeply on the instruction conveyed with it, clearly shews, that the revelation delivered to him was of great importance. The very terror also which the vision inspired, led him, and should lead us also,

to regard every word that was spoken with reverence and godly fear. As he trembled at the sight, so should we "tremble at the word."

But we must not so understand the word as if it imported only that man is not *more just or more pure* than God; for such a truth as that needed no revelation to make it known: it was obvious to all, and acknowledged by all, without any such confirmation as this. The truths intended to be made known, were these;

1. That no man is pure before God—

[Man is a weak and sinful creature: his very nature is corrupt: and therefore, whatever superiority to others he may possess in point of dispositions or conduct, he must shut his mouth, and acknowledge himself guilty before God^a. Having once violated the law in any one particular, (and it is as much violated by defect as by actual transgression,) he is condemned by it, and must to all eternity confess himself a just object of God's displeasure. Job himself, notwithstanding some apparent inconsistency in his assertions, was convinced of this, and expressed it too in very strong terms^b; just as it is elsewhere declared in Holy Scripture^c. Even the angels themselves are not so perfect, but that they are capable of committing sin, precisely as the fallen angels did: nor are they so intelligent, but that they would be guilty of the most egregious folly, if a work like that of governing the world were intrusted to them for one single hour. God therefore "can put no trust in them:" and if "he charges even them with folly," in what light must he view the children of fallen man? Verily no descendant of Adam can have any pretensions to wisdom or to purity in his sight.]

2. That no man can claim any thing at the hands of God—

[If we had done all that is commanded us, we must acknowledge ourselves to be only "unprofitable servants:" "we must have done no more than was our duty to do." The same must be said of the holy angels, no one of whom ever rendered unto God either more or better service than was his duty to perform. All idea of *merit* must be excluded as well from them as from us: and it is beyond measure surprising that any one should be found amongst the children of men so ignorant, so conceited, so presumptuous, as to conceive that

^a Rom. iii. 19. ^b Job ix. 2, 3, 20, 21, 30, 31. ^c Ps. cxliii. 2.

God can by any means be made his debtor. Instead of laying God under an obligation by any thing that we can do, we ourselves are indebted to him for that grace whereby we are enabled to do any good thing, and are more abundantly indebted to him in proportion to the good which he has enabled us to perform.]

3. That no man under any circumstances can have reason to complain of God—

[We will suppose a man to be as “perfect and upright” as Job himself: we will suppose him too to suffer as severely as ever Job suffered; and that too without any previous warning, or any assignable cause: would he have any right to complain? We answer, No: if his sufferings were a thousand times heavier, even a perfect hell itself, he would have no right to complain; because, as a sinner, he is justly obnoxious to the everlasting wrath of God. “Shall a living man complain?” says Solomon. No surely: if he were dead and in hell itself, he would have no other than his just portion; and consequently, any thing short of that is a ground rather for thankfulness than complaint.]

This we apprehend to be the import of our text, abstractedly considered: but it will be proper to notice our text,

II. As tending to decide the controversy between Job and his friends—

Eliphaz thought it admirably calculated to decide the point: and so it really was, if only it had been viewed in its proper light. Let us consider it,

1. As it was applied by Eliphaz—

[Eliphaz, as we have already observed, thought that Job was suffering on account of some great and hidden abominations: and that, if he had not committed some enormous wickedness, God was too just to punish him in so signal a way. Hence he argued thus: If a just man would not deal thus with an innocent person, how much less will God? “Shall mortal man be more just than God, and more pure than his Maker?” this is impossible: and therefore Job must be a hypocrite; and God has given me this vision on purpose that I may convince him of his hypocrisy. But all this was erroneous: the principle itself was false; and the application of it altogether unwarranted. It was not true that God always punishes great wickedness in this life; for “all things come alike to all;” and the wicked are often the most prosperous: nor was it true that Job, previous to these calamities, had committed any such

evils as they apprehended; for God himself had testified that he was perfect. Therefore, notwithstanding all his confidence, Eliphaz erred exceedingly in his interpretation of this vision.]

2. As it ought to have been applied—

[The vision had respect to the controversy: and so far Eliphaz was right: but it had not a partial reference to Job: and there Eliphaz was mistaken. It referred to all the parties, to the friends of Job as well as to Job himself. To Job it spoke powerfully, reproving him for complaining of his sufferings; because all discontent with the dispensations of God does, in fact, impeach his wisdom, and his justice in the government of the world. But “shall man be more just than God, or wiser than he who charges even the angels with folly?” This cannot be; and therefore Job was to be blamed for murmuring against God. But to his friends it spoke also. They took for granted, that, if Job was not a hypocrite, God must have been unjust in so afflicting him. But were they able to fathom all the counsels of the Almighty, and to sit in judgment upon God? Were they wiser, and more just, than HE? or was HE bound to conform his proceedings to their opinion of what was wise and just? No: they should learn therefore not to pronounce so positively upon things which were so far beyond their comprehension: they must not presume to set up their own justice as a standard, whereby to try the justice of their God; and their own wisdom, whereby to estimate the wisdom of their God. To act as they were acting, was uncharitable to their friend, and insulting to their God: and they, no less than Job, should wait for the issue of these calamities; assured, that the wisdom, the justice, and the goodness of God would at last be fully manifested in the whole of this most mysterious dispensation.]

Eliphaz was partial in his interpretation of the vision: he saw its bearing upon Job; but overlooked its application to himself. And this is indeed a too common fault in hearing the word of God. We are struck with it as applicable to our neighbour; but we do not hold it up as a glass wherein to behold ourselves: we hear for others, and not for ourselves; and thus make it an occasion rather for uncharitable censures than for personal humiliation. Let us mark this evil in Eliphaz, and watch against it in ourselves.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Be thankful to God for the written word—

[Formerly God made known himself to men in dreams and visions, and by voices and ministering spirits; but these communications were accompanied with terror, and, as in the

instance before us, not easy to be seen in all their bearings. But in the written word we have a full revelation of God's mind and will, that we may consult at all times; that we may have recourse to without any fear or terror; and that we may both clearly and fully understand: because if one part be dark and intricate, we may compare it with another that is more simple; and so, by comparing spiritual things with spiritual, may learn more certainly the mind of God. Besides, in the written word there are great leading principles, which will serve to throw light upon any point that is more obscure. If any thing appear contrary to the analogy of faith, we have a standard both of faith and practice whereby to try it; and may thus, for the most part, have our doubts respecting it removed. Let us be thankful then for such an inestimable treasure: and let us study the word, not as critics merely, or as controversialists to condemn others, but as persons desirous of discovering *their own* faults, and of conforming themselves in every thing to the mind and will of God.]

2. Bear in mind the infinite distance between you and your Maker—

[He is the great, the incomprehensible God; you are poor sinful worms crushed before the moth: He is the eternal and infinitely wise God; "you are of yesterday, and know nothing." Get but a just apprehension of the infinite distance between you and him, and all will go right with you: you will take your proper place, at the footstool of your God. You will receive with humility and confidence whatsoever he shall speak in his blessed word: you will, if we may so speak, give him credit for acting with unerring wisdom and goodness, even when his dispensations are most dark and mysterious: you will be submissive to his chastisements, and obedient to his will. Your insignificance as creatures will constrain you to bow before him, and to say, "Let him do as seemeth him good:" but your vileness as sinners will make you to regard with unbounded gratitude every mercy you enjoy, and especially that greatest of all mercies, the gift of his only dear Son to die for you. With what wonder and admiration will you embrace the salvation offered you in the Gospel! with what simplicity of mind will you live by faith on the Lord Jesus Christ! and with what zeal and diligence will you devote yourselves to his service! We say again, if only God be exalted in your eyes, and you be abased in the dust, all will be well: God will be glorified, and your souls be happy, both in time and eternity.]

CCCCLV.

THE SECURITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Job v. 19—27. *He shall deliver thee in six troubles : yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee. In famine he shall redeem thee from death : and in war from the power of the sword. Thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue : neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh : neither shalt thou be afraid of the beasts of the earth. For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field : and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee. And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace : and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin. Thou shalt know also that thy seed shall be great, and thine offspring as the grass of the earth. Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season. Lo this, we have searched it, so it is ; hear it, and know thou it for thy good.*

THE friends of Job were men of undoubted piety, and of very deep and extensive knowledge in the things of God. Unhappily they had taken up an erroneous principle in relation to the dealings of God with men in this world ; and from that error proceeded all their criminations of Job, together with a continual misapplication of the sublimest truths. This distinction we must ever bear in mind : their general views of divine truth were most sublime and glorious : it was only the particular point of doctrine respecting divine providence in which they were mistaken, and in which their sentiments are not to be depended on. This very speech of Eliphaz is repeatedly quoted in other parts of Scripture as of divine authority. Solomon adopts one part of it^a ; St. Paul quotes different parts^b ; St. James also refers to it^c : we may therefore safely regard the promises recorded in our text as the declarations of God himself ; more especially as there is not one expression in them which is not confirmed by a variety of other passages of Holy Writ. Indeed Eliphaz himself

^a Prov. iii. 11.^b 1 Cor. iii. 19. Heb. xii. 5.^c Jam. i. 12. and v. 11.

lays singular stress upon them, declaring, from the deepest "*search*," his full conviction of their truth; and urging a reliance on them as a most infallible source of "*good*." Regarding them therefore in this light, we shall endeavour to *explain*, *confirm*, and *improve* them.

I. To explain them—

They are very great and comprehensive—

[They ensure to every believing soul a *full deliverance from all evil*. Evils may arise in quick succession, not only "six or seven," but to an indefinite extent: the pressure of famine and the calamities of war may be felt by him as well as others; and the scourge of calumny may be directed against him in a more peculiar and exclusive manner: but he shall find such interpositions of God in his favour, either for his exemption from the trial, or for his support under it, as shall sufficiently distinguish him from all others. In the very midst of the trials he shall feel himself like a man in an impregnable fortress, that "laughs at" the efforts of his bitterest foes. So chained shall all his enemies appear, that he shall feel as if the very "stones of the field were in league with him" not to wound his foot, and "the beasts of the field" not to open their mouths against him.

The same sweet assurance also is given him as to *an enjoyment of all comfort*. Not only is his mind at peace in relation to his own *personal* concerns; he has equal composure in reference to those of a *domestic* nature. Whilst he sees his family growing up around him, he knows that they also are under the protection of an all-wise Providence; and that no evil shall befall *them*. If he "visit his habitation," he has no fear that he shall find his family overwhelmed with troubles, or that he shall be *disappointed*^d in his hopes of seeing them in "peace" and safety. Nor is it in life only that he is thus blessed, but in death also; to which he shall be brought, when ripe for glory, as a shock of corn, fully meet for the granary of heaven.]

They must however be understood with limitations and restrictions—

[Though "godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come," we are not to imagine, that the temporal promises are on the same precise footing with those which relate to things spiritual and eternal.

^d The word translated "*sin*," is in the margin translated "*err*:" and the true sense of the passage is that given above.

^e 1 Tim. iv. 8.

Grace and glory are secured to the believer *at all events*; whilst temporal prosperity is secured only so far *as shall ultimately conduce to his eternal welfare*. To *this extent* the promises are equally sure: but where the benefit of the soul will be most promoted by circumstances that are painful to flesh and blood, the lesser good gives way to the greater; and God, as a wise Parent, sends us that which he knows to be most for our eternal good. If we do not thus restrict the promises of temporal happiness, we shall be at a loss to account for all the trials that have befallen the saints from the time of Abel until this present hour: but, with that solution, there is not, nor ever has been, the smallest difference between the promises of God's word, and the dispensations of his providence.]

The promises in our text being thus explained, we proceed,

II. To confirm them—

The whole Scripture bears testimony to the truth of them. “*Search,*”

1. The Law—

[Precisely the same promises were made to the Jewish people, if only they would serve their God in sincerity and truth^f— — —]

2. The Prophets—

[Not to dwell on each individual promise, we may find the whole collected together in one psalm by the sweet singer of Israel^g — — —]

3. The New Testament—

[Not only are we told in general that “God is faithful, and will not suffer his people to be tempted above that they are able^h,” but we find the Apostle actually applying to himself the promises of God to the full extent that they are specified in the textⁱ, and actually glorying over all the enemies that might be supposed capable of interfering with their accomplishment^k — — —]

In a word, the promises which we have been considering are confirmed by the uniform tenor of the Holy Scriptures; and “they are sure to all” who truly rely upon them^l.]

Convinced of the truth of these promises, we are now only concerned,

III. To improve them—

^f Lev. xxvi. 3—12.

^g Ps. xci. 1—16.

^h 1 Cor. x. 13.

ⁱ 2 Tim. iv. 18.

^k Rom. viii. 35—39.

^l Rom. iv. 16.

Nothing can exceed the importance of them; since they most forcibly teach us,

1. Submission in trials—

[Be it so, that our afflictions are great and manifold; can we have any reason for complaint, when we know that they are all ordered in number, measure, and duration, for our best and greatest good, according to the counsels of infinite wisdom and love? Can we have reason for complaint when we are assured, that they are the very dispensations which we should choose for ourselves, if we saw the issue of them as clearly as God sees it? It is in this very view that the promises are introduced, namely, to pacify the mind of Job, and to reconcile him to the afflictions which he was called to sustain^m: and, if once we are convinced that God is fulfilling to us the promises of his word, we shall receive even the most painful dispensations as blessings in disguiseⁿ.]

2. Confidence in supplications—

[What will he who unsolicited “has given us such exceeding great and precious promises,” refuse to our earnest petitions? The very end for which he gave them was, “that by them we might be partakers of the divine nature^o,” and be enabled “to perfect holiness in the fear of God^p.” Can we ask for any thing more than this? If we can conceive of any thing beyond, he says, “Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you:” yea, he teaches us to expect that he will do for us exceeding abundantly “above all that we can ask or think.” Let us then “draw nigh to him in full assurance of faith:” let us “open our mouths wide, that he may fill them;” and let us say to him in the confidence of a successful issue, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”]

3. Activity in obedience—

[Who can hear such promises as God has made to us in our text, and not say, “What shall I render unto the Lord?” Can any “commandment be grievous,” that proceeds from *him*? If dissuaded from any exertion or any sufferings for his sake, should we not instantly reply, “What mean ye to weep and to break my heart?” for “I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die” the most cruel death for so unspeakably gracious and good a God^q. My Brethren, let this unbounded “love of His constrain you to live no more unto yourselves, but wholly and unreservedly to him” — — — Then indeed will this grace of God have produced its due effect, and, as Eliphaz intimates in our text, we shall have “heard and known it for our good.”]

^m ver. 17, 18. ⁿ See Rom. viii. 28. 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. 1 Pet. i. 7.

^o 2 Pet. i. 4.

^p 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^q Acts xxi. 13.

CCCCLVI.

MAN'S TIME ON EARTH FIXED.

Job vii. 1. *Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?
are not his days also like the days of an hireling?*

THE precise connexion of these words is not very clear: nor, as far as the sense of them is concerned, is it of any great importance to inquire respecting it. It should seem that Job, having been reproved by his friend Eliphaz for expressing too strongly and too impatiently his wish for death to terminate his troubles, here vindicates himself by an appeal to him, that, if an hireling looks forward with comfort to the rest that awaits him after his labours, much more may he desire rest under his great and accumulated afflictions.

But, waving any further consideration of this, I will endeavour to shew,

I. What these interrogations import—

Wherever appeals are made to man in the inspired volume, we may be sure that the things asserted are true, and that they are deserving of particular attention. Those which present themselves to our notice in the text plainly imply,

1. That man's time on earth is fixed by God himself—

[The time of our birth is fixed by Him who formed us in the womb, and breathed into our nostrils the breath of life. Our continuance, also, in life is fixed. No man can deprive us of life till our time is come; nor can any man protract his existence upon earth one moment, when the appointed period of his dissolution has arrived. "No man," says Solomon, "hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war^a." No: "his days are determined, the number of his months are with God, who hath appointed his bounds, which he cannot pass^b," "Our times are altogether in God's hands^c;" and "all the days of our appointed time must we wait, until our change come^d."]]

^a Eccl. viii. 8: —

^b Job xiv. 5.

^c Ps. xxxi. 15.

^d Job xiv. 14.

2. That during that time we have a work to do, and a warfare to maintain—

[The word, “our appointed time,” is, in the margin, translated “our warfare.” The same word occurs in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, and is there translated, “warfare:” “Her warfare is accomplished:” and there the marginal reading is, “appointed time^e.” Without determining which is preferable here, we will include both. We have a work to do, even “as an hireling,” who labours in the field. To serve our God, and to seek the salvation of our souls, are the great ends of life. In this work we must engage, not as labourers only, but as soldiers also: for we have corrupt propensities, which must be mortified, and powerful adversaries that must be withstood. Our conflicts with these may well be called a “warfare;” for, indeed, we can never hope to overcome them, if we go not forth to the combat “in the strength of Christ, and put not on the whole armour of God^f.” The world with its temptations, the flesh with all its lusts, and the devil with all his wiles, are ever seeking to destroy us: and, unless we “fight manfully the good fight of faith^g,” it cannot fail but that we must perish. During the whole period of our abode on earth this warfare must be maintained; nor must we ever put off our armour till our victory be complete. It cannot be supposed that God has sent us into the world merely to please and gratify ourselves, like the rich fool, who said, “Let us eat, drink, and be merry.” There is not an hireling who feels not that he has some work assigned him, nor a soldier who does not expect that he will have some conflicts to sustain: and every Christian must regard himself as invested with these characters, and, as of necessity, called to the performance of these duties.]

3. That, at the expiration of that time, God will give us a recompence according to our works—

[The hireling expects his pay, and the soldier his discharge, when they have completed the term for which they were engaged, and fulfilled the offices to which they were appointed. And we, also, may look forward, even as Moses did, to “a recompence of reward^h,” which our Divine Master will surely give to all his faithful servants. Doubtless, whatever be our labours or our conflicts, it is “not a reward of debt, but a reward of graceⁱ,” that we are to hope for: but still God has graciously pledged himself that “our labour shall not be in vain^k,” and he would even esteem himself “unrighteous, if

^e Isai. xl. 2.

^g 1 Cor. xvi. 13. 1 Tim. vi. 12.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 4.

^f Eph. vi. 10—18.

^h Heb. xi. 26.

^k 1 Cor. xv. 58.

he were to forget the works and labours of love which we have performed for his name's sake¹.”]

The import of the interrogations being sufficiently clear, let me point out,

II. What they suggest to every reflecting mind—

Whole volumes would not suffice for a full statement of this part of our subject. To mention only what is most obvious, they suggest,

1. That we should perform with diligence our appointed work—

[We expect a hireling or a soldier to do this. If they were unmindful of their calling, or loitered in it, we should account them worthy of reproof. But their offices, however important, are not to be compared with those which we have to discharge: theirs relate to time and to mortals like ourselves; but ours relate to God and to eternity. Let us, then, at the commencement of every day, ask ourselves, “What have I to do for God and for my own soul this day?” And “whatsoever our hand findeth to do, let us do it with all our might^m.”]

2. That we should sustain with patience the trials that are allotted us—

[Trials there are in every situation of life, and especially in those which expose us to great fatigue and danger. No hireling or soldier expects to escape them. They are regarded as necessarily attached to the offices which such persons have to perform. And can *we* hope to escape them; *we*, whose work is so arduous, and whose warfare is so continued? We should be prepared for them, and have our minds fore-armed against them: and, bearing in mind who it is that has appointed them, and what he deserves at our hands, we should welcome every trial as a means of displaying our attachment to him, and of honouring that God whose servants we are.]

3. That we may look forward to our dismissal from the body as a season much to be desired—

[*This*, perhaps, is the primary idea intended in the text. At all events, the hireling welcomes the rest and recompence which await him after the labours of the day, as the soldier does his discharge after a long and dangerous campaign. What then should *we* do, whose rest will be so glorious, and whose recompence so great? Can we think of the approbation of our

¹ Heb. vi. 10.

^m Eccl. ix. 10.

God, and not pant for the time when we shall hear him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?" Can we survey all the glory and felicity of heaven, and the crowns and kingdoms that await us there, and not long for the period when we shall be invested with them? St. Paul "desired to depart, and to be with Christⁿ," yea, and "groaned in spirit" for the time, "when, the earthly house of this tabernacle being dissolved, he should possess a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens^o." We, then, may exercise the same holy disposition; not, indeed, through weariness of life, but through desire of beholding our God face to face: our wish must be, "not merely to be unclothed (and freed from the storms and tempests of this present world), but clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life^p."]

In a REVIEW of this subject, what matter do we find,

1. For humiliation!

[What if a hireling employed by us had performed his work, from day to day, as we have ours; of what reward should we account *him* worthy? Or, if a soldier in our army had discharged his duties as we have ours; what recompence would *he* receive at the hands of his commander? Yet, our zeal and diligence ought to have far exceeded those of the most industrious labourer and the most devoted soldier upon earth. Ah, Brethren, the very best amongst us has need to weep in the review of all his past life, and even of the very best day that he ever spent, and the best services that he ever rendered. But rise, I pray you, to your duty; and redeem, as much as possible, the time you have lost. What advice would you give to a man that was under sentence of condemnation, even though two or three months were yet to intervene before the execution of his sentence? Take that advice to yourselves, and follow it: and pray mightily to God, that your appointed time, whether it be short or long, may be so improved, as you will wish you had improved it, when you shall come to die.]

2. For encouragement!

[Had we to perform our work in our own strength, or to "carry on our warfare at our own cost," we might well despair. But it is not so. The Spirit of the living God is promised to us, to "help our infirmities;" and "he who has begun the good work in us has engaged to perfect it until the day of Christ^a."

ⁿ Phil. i. 23.

^p 2 Cor. v. 4.

^o 2 Cor. v. 1—3.

^a Phil. i. 6.

Count not, then, your difficulties or your dangers, as though they were too great for you to encounter. Only go forth in the strength of Christ, and you may say to all of them, "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain^r." Your weakness, if only you feel it as you ought, should rather be an occasion of satisfaction than of despondency; since, "when you are weak, then shall you be strong; and Christ's strength shall be perfected in your weakness^s." After all, who can tell how few your conflicts may be? Perhaps your appointed time is already so near a close, that you have but a few days or hours to live. Be this as it may, "let your loins be girt, and your lamps trimmed, as those that wait for the coming of their Lord; that, at whatever hour he shall come, he may find you watching." "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."]

^r Zech. iv. 7.

^s 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

CCCCLVII.

BILDAD WARNS JOB OF THE DANGER OF HYPOCRISY.

Job viii. 8—14. *Inquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers: (for we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:) shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter words out of their heart? Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water? Whilst it is yet in his greenness, and not cut down, it withereth before any other herb. So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish: whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web.*

RELIGIOUS controversy is rarely carried on with that meekness and candour, which are necessary to render it profitable to the soul. Even in such a sacred subject as religion, the generality seek for victory rather than for truth, and put such a construction on the expressions of their adversary as to distort his sentiments and to calumniate his views. The friends of Job, though good men, were guilty of this to a very great extent. In the chapter before us, Bildad begins his reply with a most unjustifiable misconstruction of all that Job had spoken; and

accuses him of having represented God as “perverting justice;” when Job certainly never intended to make so impious an assertion. But still we must remember, that the general sentiments of Bildad were just; and that, if Job had really been such a character as his friends imagined, the warnings which they suggested, and the advice which they gave him, were on the whole both salutary and good.

In order to enter fully into the meaning of the words before us, we must particularly bear in mind, that Bildad regarded the sons of Job as ungodly, and Job himself as hypocritical^a. In this view, he designates the former as “forgetting God,” and the latter as having acted “the hypocrite” before him: and both the one and the other he compares to “a rush,” which, when deprived of water, withers in a very short space of time.

We shall consider this comparison,

I. In reference to those who manifestly “forget God”—

Here, as we have observed, we must keep in view the precise *character* which Bildad considered as belonging to the sons of Job—

[They were living in ease and affluence, happy in their family connexions, and blessed with an abundant measure of harmony in their domestic circle. The apprehension which their father had, lest his sons should by any means have been led to dishonour God in their mirth^b, shews, that they were not, in his opinion at least, possessed of solid piety; whilst, on the other hand, it shewed, that they were not addicted to impiety. Now persons of this description are very numerous: “There is a generation,” says Solomon, “that are pure in their own eyes, but are not washed from their filthiness^c”: they fill up their stations in life with credit to themselves, and with benefit to all around them: they are irreproachable in their character, as men of honour and integrity, of kindness and benevolence, of decency and decorum: and in all these respects they are, “like the rush in the mire, green and flourishing.”

In their prospects also and their expectations, they are

^a Compare Job iv. 7—11. and v. 3—5. with viii. 4, 6.

^b Job i. 5.

^c Prov. xxx. 12.

happy. Not anticipating evil, they look forward to fresh gratifications, like travellers in a rich and fertile country. In early youth they form sanguine hopes of settling in the world; and then of advancing their rising families: and thus, having always some fresh object in view, they run their career of pleasure or ambition, and conclude that, at the termination of it, they shall stand as high in the approbation of their God, as they do in the estimation of their ignorant fellow-creatures.]

In their *end* also an especial reference is made to them—

[Those of the foregoing character, whilst living in their proper element, the world, flourish; but when, through illness or misfortunes, they can no longer enjoy the world, like the rush or flag in a season of drought, they wither: they need “not be cut down” by great calamities; small trials suffice to rob them of all their verdure, and to reduce them to a very pitiful and drooping state. “In the fulness of their sufficiency they are in straits^d,” and they are compelled, however reluctantly, to inscribe on every created enjoyment, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”

But, if we look to the period of their departure hence, we shall find the text yet more awfully verified in them: then *indeed* “all their hopes perish, even as a spider’s web.” We have a most remarkable illustration of their state in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man seems to have been much such a character as we suppose these to be: he “lived to the flesh rather than to the Spirit,” and “to himself rather than unto God.” This was the rich man’s sin; (we charge him wrongfully, if we accuse him of avarice or oppression;) and it is the sin of those we are now speaking of^e: they “forget God:” they forget, that God is entitled to all their love, and to all the service which they can possibly render to him: they forget, that, as he is the Author, so he should be also the End, of their being; and that, “whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they should have a single eye to his glory.” The end of such a course is seen in the rich man; who was no sooner taken from his present enjoyments, than he was cast into hell, where he “lift up his eyes in torments, and entreated in vain for a drop of water to cool his tongue.” We find him too requesting that a messenger might be “sent to his five surviving brethren, to warn them, lest they also should come into the same place of torment:” for then he found, what during his life he would not believe, what must of necessity

^d Job xx. 22.

^e Rom. viii. 5. and xiv. 7—9. and 2 Cor. v. 15.

be the issue of such a life ; he found, what all must find, (either now by faith, or hereafter by their own actual experience,) that “ the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that *forget God*.”]

The comparison in our text will be found no less just, if we consider it,

II. In reference to those who make a hypocritical profession of serving God—

As under the former head we have kept Job’s sons in view, so here we must keep Job himself in view.

In Bildad’s opinion of *him* we find the true notion of a hypocrite—

[Job had maintained a high reputation for sanctity, and had shewn a great zeal for God’s honour *in relation to others* ; but, as Bildad erroneously thought, had neglected to consult it himself, or to live agreeably to his avowed principles. This, though not the true character of Job, is a just description of many amongst ourselves : they profess to venerate religion, and shew much zeal in the propagation of it : they pretend also to feel deeply, when any depart from the good way, and bring a disgrace on their holy profession : but yet they are themselves under the dominion of some besetting sin. They are secretly indulging pride, envy, malice, covetousness, lewdness, or some other bosom lust : they do not live nigh to God in their secret chamber, or aspire after an entire conformity to his will : they are more anxious to appear religious, than to be so, and to be applauded of man, than to be approved of God.]

Now these persons, whilst carried on by a conceit of their own superior knowledge of divine truth, and a desire of establishing a character for piety, are, like the flag in the water, green and flourishing : they seem extremely rapid in their growth ; and are regarded, both by themselves and others, as persons of a higher order of being.]

But the hope of all such persons is most delusive—

[It rarely happens that a hypocrite continues long to deceive those who are acquainted with his private habits : he cannot maintain a consistency of character, for want of an inward principle of grace. Like the seed sown in ground where it “ had no depth of earth,” or like the flag destitute of water, he withers away, and exposes both himself and religion

[†] Ps. ix. 17.

to general contempt. For the truth of this we may appeal to the records of former ages; yea, "though we are of yesterday and know nothing," as it were, we must have seen it but too frequently in our own day; that persons of high expectation have declined from the right path, and "made shipwreck either of faith or of a good conscience." As Lot's wife was a monument in the Old Testament, so is Demas in the New: and similar monuments are yet found in every Church.

But let us follow the hypocrite also into the eternal world: what is his condition *there*? Alas! alas! however high he was in his own estimation or in that of others, he is now fallen *indeed*; and all his towering hopes are now swept away with the besom of destruction^g. Even whilst he is here carrying on his deception, though it be unsuspected by himself or others, and though his hypocrisy be not in *act*, but in *heart* only, he is "treasuring up wrath for himself^h" against "the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesusⁱ." Possibly he may carry his confidence with him into the eternal world, and almost presume to expostulate with his Judge: but "he will say to them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity^k:" and then shall their state be so superlatively wretched, that they who sink the deepest into perdition are said to "take their portion with the hypocrites."]

O that we might all LEARN from this subject,

1. The importance of piety—

[We are not disposed to undervalue the blessings of worldly prosperity, or domestic happiness: but in comparison of eternal blessedness we must needs say, that every thing in this world is only as the dust of the balance. Yet the highest ambition of parents for their children is, to see them precisely in the way that Job's children were, all with separate establishments, living in sweet harmony with each other, and in the vicinity of their parents, where all as one family, may augment and enjoy the happiness of the whole. This state also is regarded by young persons of both sexes as the summit of their ambition. But even in this life we see how soon their gourd may be withered by a worm at the root: and after this life, nothing remains of it, but a fearful responsibility for every hour that has been spent in a forgetfulness of God. Indeed, indeed, however the ungodly may scoff at piety, there is nothing that deserves a thought in comparison of it. If the whole world be no adequate price for one single soul, it is madness to be bartering away our souls, as so many do, for the veriest trifles that

^g See Job xx. 4—7.

ⁱ Rom. ii. 16.

^h Job xxxvi. 13.

^k Matt. vii. 22, 23.

can be presented to our view. To all then, and especially to the young, I would say, Remember God; "remember your Creator in the days of youth" or health; and let "the life which you now live in the flesh, be by faith in the Son of God, who loved you and gave himself for you." But, if you are still disposed to hold fast your delusive expectations, go and sweep away a spider's web, and then *reflect, how suddenly, and irrecoverably, it is destroyed*. Then say with yourself, Such is my hope, and such will ere long be the termination of it. "O consider this, ye that forget God, lest HE tear *you* in pieces, and there be none to deliver you¹."]

2. The danger of self-deception—

[All see how others deceive themselves; yet none, of whatever class, imagine themselves to be in any great danger of self-delusion. But St. James tells us, that we may "seem to be religious," and persuade ourselves that we are so, and yet "deceive our own souls, and have our religion vain^m." O remember, that we live in a deceitful world, and have an adversary whose wiles and devices are inconceivably subtle; and that our own "hearts also are deceitful above all things and desperately wicked:" and let the consideration of these things make you "jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy." Be not too confident that all is right with you; but say with Paul, "Though I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lordⁿ." Yet, if you have "the testimony of your own conscience that with simplicity and godly sincerity you have your conversation in the world, you may rejoice in it^o:" only "rejoice with trembling^p;" and, bearing in mind that "God requireth truth in the inward parts^q," beg of him to "search and try you^r," and to make you "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile."]

¹ Ps. l. 22.

^m Jam. i. 26.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iv. 4.

^o 2 Cor. i. 12.

^p Ps. ii. 11.

^q Ps. li. 6.

^r Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

CCCCLVIII.

THE FOLLY OF SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PRESUMPTION.

Job ix. 2—4. *How should man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened against him, and hath prospered?*

THE fundamental doctrines of our holy religion are not like the deductions of human reason, which

leave a degree of doubt upon the mind: they correspond with something within us, which contributes to assure us that the things which we have received upon the divine testimony are unquestionably true. The inspired writers indeed, knowing by whom they were inspired, delivered without hesitation those things of which they had no internal evidence, as well as those which were confirmed by their own experience. Nevertheless there is a peculiar energy in their mode of declaring experimental truths: they make them a subject of appeal to their very enemies, and challenge the whole universe to deny the things whereof they affirm. Thus it was with Job. Bildad had charged him with asserting his own perfect innocence, and accusing God as unjust in his proceedings towards him: "Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" Job, in his reply, allowed the premises of his opponent, but denied the consequences which were deduced from them: "I know it is so of a truth;" that is, I know God will not pervert justice: "but" I deny that I ever intended to justify myself before God, or to harden myself against him; for I am as fully convinced of the folly of acting in such a manner, as you or any one else can be: "How can man," &c.

In this reply Job strongly asserts two things;

I. The folly of justifying ourselves before God—

Many there are who justify themselves before God—

[Few indeed, if any, will deny that they have sinned: but all unregenerate persons will deny that they deserve the wrath of God: at least, if, on account of some flagrant transgression, they be constrained to confess themselves obnoxious to eternal punishment, they hope by some repentance or reformation to compensate for their sins, and to establish a righteousness whereby they may find acceptance with God.]

But this proceeds from an ignorance of the divine law—

["The law of God is perfect^a;" "the commandment is

^a Ps. xix. 7.

exceeding broad^b:" it extends not to actions only, but to the thoughts and desires of the heart^c; and it requires perfect and perpetual obedience^d. On our failure in any one particular, it denounces a curse against us^e; and from that period it can never justify us. It admits of no repentance on our part, or relaxation on God's part^f. It is as immutable as God himself: and it is owing to men's ignorance of this law that they so foolishly build upon it as the foundation of their hopes.]

None who understand this law will ever look for justification from it—

[If amongst a thousand perfect actions, *one* only were found defective, it were sufficient to condemn us for ever. But, if we will try ourselves by the law, we shall not find "one action of a thousand," no, nor one in our whole lives, that will not condemn us. If we should presume to "contend with God" respecting the perfection of our best action, how soon would he confound us! Even *we* will venture to expose the folly of such presumption. Bring forth your action to the light: was there nothing amiss in *its principle*, nothing defective in *the manner*, nothing of a selfish mixture in *its end*? See if you can answer a weak sinful creature like yourselves: and, if you cannot, how will you "answer" the pure heart-searching "God?"

See then the folly of hoping ever to "be just with God;" and adopt the language of David, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified^g."]]

But there is another point in the text to which we must advert, namely,

II. The folly of hardening ourselves against God—

Those who justify themselves before God are equally prone to harden themselves against him—

[This they do by their *unbelief* and *impenitence*: they will not give credit to the declarations of God concerning them: they think, in direct opposition to all that God has spoken, that he will never execute his threatenings against the transgressors of his law. They profess to hope that repentance will appease his anger; and yet they put off their repentance from

^b Ps. cxix. 96.

^c "Thou shalt not *covet*," i. e. Thou shalt not *harbour*, thou shalt not even *have*, an inordinate desire, Rom. vii. 7.

^d Gal. iii. 10.

^e Gal. iii. 10.

^f Matt. v. 18.

^g Ps. xix. 12. and xl. 12. and cxxx. 3. and cxliii. 2.

year to year, and take occasion even from his mercy to sin the more against him.]

The folly of this appears,

1. From the character of God—

[If God were ignorant of what passes in our minds, or unable to punish us for our sins, we need not concern ourselves so much about him. But are “the thick clouds a covering to him, so that he cannot see us^h?” or “are we stronger than he, so that we can provoke him to jealousyⁱ” without any fear of his resentment? No: “he is wise in heart, and mighty in strength:” he beholds the most secret emotions of our hearts, and will surely call us into judgment for them. What folly is it then to “harden ourselves against him,” when “neither rocks nor mountains can conceal us from him,” nor the whole universe combined deliver us from his hands^k!]

2. From the experience of men—

[“Who amongst all the sons of men ever prospered,” while he lived in an impenitent and unbelieving state? Many indeed have been wealthy and powerful^l; but who ever had solid *peace in his conscience*? Who ever had real *comfort in a dying-hour*? Who ever had *happiness in the eternal world*? This is the only prosperity that deserves our notice; and, in this view of it, the question in the text is unanswerable.

But, if we cannot tell of one that prospered, can we not recount multitudes that have been marked as objects of God’s most signal vengeance? Was not the rebellious Pharaoh visited with ten successive plagues, and drowned at last, with all his army, in the Red Sea^m? Was not the vain-glorious Nebuchadnezzar changed, as it were, into a beast for the space of seven years for his impious boasting against Godⁿ? Was not his son Belshazzar warned by a hand-writing on the wall, in the midst of his lewd, drunken, and blaspheming revels; and, agreeably to the prediction, dethroned and slain that very night^o? But why do we mention individual instances, when we are told, that “every one who, after repeated reproofs, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy^p?” Who that considers this denunciation, must not confess, that such opposition to a God of infinite wisdom and power is madness itself?]

^h Job xxii. 13, 14.

^k Dan. iv. 37. Prov. xi. 21.

^m Exod. ix. 17. and xiv. 17, 28.

^o Dan. v. 22—28, 30.

ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 22.

^l Ps. lxxiii. 3—12.

ⁿ Dan. v. 20, 21.

^p Prov. xxix. 1.

These things then being clear, the following ADVICE cannot but approve itself to the consciences of all—

1. Be attentive to the concerns of your souls—

[To “repent, and believe the Gospel,” was the advice which Jesus himself gave to his hearers: and it is as necessary for you as it was for them. But it may be thought that an attention to spiritual concerns will interfere with your worldly prosperity. This however is not a necessary consequence: there can be no doubt but that, if you serve God faithfully, the world will hate you: but prudence and diligence may advance your temporal interests even in spite of the world’s hatred. Be it so, however: your temporal and spiritual welfare, we will say, are in direct opposition to each other: can it be doubted which you should prefer? Is not the soul of more value than ten thousand worlds? Seek then the prosperity which God approves, and which will continue for ever.]

2. Study the Gospel in particular—

[It is the Gospel alone that can enable you to answer that important question, “How shall man be just with God?” That takes your eyes off from human attainments, and directs them to the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is there “set forth as a propitiation for sin, that, through him, God may be just, and yet the justifier of penitent and believing sinners^q.” From thence you learn, that Christ’s obedience unto death is a sufficient plea against all the accusations of God’s law; and that, if you be washed in his blood, God himself will not behold in you the least spot or blemish^r. It was from “the Gospel as originally preached to Abraham,” that *he* found out the method of a sinner’s acceptance with God^s. All the Apostles acquiesced in this way of salvation: they all renounced their own works in point of dependence, and sought for mercy through faith in Christ^t. Let the Gospel then, whether as written by the first ministers of Christ, or as preached by those who now follow their steps, be your meditation and delight: so shall you find support under the most accumulated trials, and be accepted of your God in the day of judgment.]

^q Rom. iii. 24—26.

^r Eph. v. 25—27.

^s Gal. iii. 6—9.

^t Gal. ii. 15, 16.

CCCCLIX.

THE EVIL OF A SELF-JUSTIFYING SPIRIT.

Job ix. 20, 21. *If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life.*

IN controversies of every kind, and more especially in those which relate to religion, the disputants are, for the most part, more anxious to obtain the victory than to discover truth. Hence, instead of putting that precise construction on each other's words which they were designed to bear, they labour to turn to their own advantage every expression of their adversary, and to derive from it an argument for the support of their own cause. Even good men are by no means so candid as they ought to be in relation to this matter, more especially when they become heated by opposition. The friends of Job were exceedingly faulty in this particular. They first charged Job with hypocrisy; and then, when he asserted his own innocence in relation to that heinous sin, they represented him as asserting his freedom from *all* sin, and as justifying himself as a righteous person before God. This was by no means the intention of Job: on the contrary, he here explicitly declares, that "no man can be just before God," and that he should stand utterly self-condemned if he should presume to arrogate to himself any such measure of perfection. He had stated in the foregoing verse, that if he should dare to contend with God, he could neither withstand his power, nor put himself into a capacity to make good his cause before him^b: and now he renounces with abhorrence any such impious idea. Of the former verse of our text, this is the plain and obvious meaning: and in the latter verse, the same idea seems yet more strongly, though not so plainly, stated: "Though I were perfect," so far as not to be aware of any evil that I had ever committed, "yet

^a ver. 2.^b ver. 19.

would I not know my soul," or pretend to know it as the heart-searching God does: "I would despise my own life," and submit to any death, rather than presume to offer such an insult to the Majesty of heaven. Thus he avows, in opposition to the charge that had been brought against him, first, *the folly*, and next, *the impiety*, of a self-justifying spirit. These two we propose to consider in their order:

I. The folly of a self-justifying spirit—

By a self-justifying spirit we understand, a persuasion of mind that we do not deserve God's wrath and indignation, but, on the contrary, that we do deserve his favour and blessing. Now supposing a person to indulge this spirit, what does he, in fact, affirm? He affirms, if not in words, yet by clear inference, what "his mouth must utterly condemn." He affirms,

1. That there is no truth in the Scriptures—

[The Scriptures in every part either affirm, or take for granted, that man is a sinner, justly condemned, and standing in need of mercy at the hands of an offended God. Now to talk of perfection, or of being righteous before God, is to assert directly the reverse of what the Scriptures assert, and, consequently, to say that there is no truth in them. But will any one dare to speak thus concerning the sacred oracles? Will not his own mouth instantly condemn him as a proud and wicked infidel? or, if he profess to believe the Holy Scriptures, and yet maintain the notion of his being righteous before God, will not his own mouth still condemn him as guilty of the grossest inconsistency? Believer or unbeliever, he must equally stand self-refuted, and self-condemned.]

2. That there is no sin in his heart—

[We ask not whether there be any flagrant iniquities that can be laid to his charge: it is sufficient if once, in ever so small a degree, in act, word, or thought, he have transgressed, or fallen short of, the perfect law of God: having offended thus far, he has broken the law, and is from that moment subjected to its curse*. Now to be justified by the very law that condemns us, is a contradiction in terms: so that the person who pretends to be just before God must either deny that he has any sin in his heart, or maintain the contradiction before stated. If it be said, that he may imagine that the law admits

* Gal. iii. 10.

of imperfections, and justifies us notwithstanding those imperfections, we answer, that we cannot make laws of our own, but must take the law as we find it: and that the law, being a perfect transcript of God's mind and will, can be satisfied with nothing but perfect and perpetual obedience: and consequently, if ever we have transgressed it in the smallest measure, we are, and must for ever be, condemned by it. To deny the perfection of the law would be to deny the perfection of God, which is atheism: and to admit its perfection, and yet dream of justification by it, is such an absurdity, as every man's own mouth must condemn. The only possible ground of being justified by it must be, that we have no sin in our hearts: and, if any man dare affirm that, his own mouth has already proved him most ignorant and perverse^d.]

3. That he has no need of a Saviour—

[If he be righteous himself, he has no need to be clothed in another's righteousness, nor any need of an atonement for his sins: consequently, as far at least as relates to that individual, God has sent his own Son in vain. And will any man say that God, in making his Son "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world," was under a mistake, and that for himself he needed no such exercise of mercy? Why then does such a man call himself a Christian? If he stood in no need of Christ, and is in a state of justification without Christ, he should cease to "name the name of Christ:" for whilst he continues to do so, his own mouth condemns him, and proves him perverse. "If righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain^e."]]

But let us proceed to notice,

II. The impiety of it—

It was not without good reason that Job expressed such an abhorrence of the spirit that was imputed to him: for the indulging of it is,

1. A criminating of God—

[There is not a perfection of the Deity which is not dishonoured by a self-justifying spirit. It impeaches and vilifies his truth; seeing that he has represented all to be in a state of guilt and condemnation before him. It denies his justice; since he threatens all men with death, when there are some who do not deserve it. It degrades his wisdom; since it supposes that that wonderful contrivance of providing a surety for us, and laying our sins upon him, was unnecessary. It holds

^d 1 John i. 8.

^e Gal. ii. 21.

up to derision also his mercy and grace, which are proclaimed as incomprehensibly great and glorious, when the very offer of them is only an empty sound. Hear what God himself says: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a LIAR^f." Can any thing be conceived more heinous than this? Should we not "despise our own lives," and submit to ten thousand deaths, rather than be guilty of it?]

2. A contempt of our own souls—

[God has provided a salvation for us, and offered it freely to all who will accept it in and through his beloved Son; and has told us, that "there is no other name under heaven whereby we can be saved," but that of Jesus; and yet we choose to ground our claim of happiness on the purity and perfection of our own character, rather than submit to be saved in his appointed way. But is not this madness? Will a man deal so with his temporal interests? will he risk the loss of them upon a mere phantom of his own imagination, in direct opposition to the plainest dictates of his understanding? Surely, if men had the least value for their souls, they would not so trifle with them; they would at least endeavour to ascertain what degree of weight was due to their opinions, and whether there was any rational ground for them to expect God's blessing in a way so contrary to his own most express and solemn declarations. But their total indifference about the issue of their confidence shews, that they account their souls of no value, or, as Solomon expresses it, "they despise their own souls^g."]]

3. A trampling under foot the Son of God—

[This is God's own representation of the sin. In rejecting the sacrifice of Christ, there being no other sacrifice, we cut ourselves off from all hope of salvation; yea, "we trample under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of grace^h." What amazing impiety is this! We are apt to confine our ideas of impiety to gross sins committed against our fellow-creatures: and such an error as self-righteousness we suppose to be of very little importance. But it is not thus that God estimates sin: he views sin chiefly as it dishonours him, and more especially as it militates against that stupendous effort of his love, the redemption of the world by the blood and righteousness of his beloved Son. Know then, that to justify ourselves, is to repeat, in fact, the conduct of those who crucified the Lord of glory; it is to "crucify him afresh," and to say, "We will not have this man to reign over us."]

^f 1 John i. 10.

^g Prov. xv. 32.

^h Heb. x. 26—29.

This subject may be further IMPROVED,

1. For our conviction—

[Who was it that used the language in our text? It was Job, of whom God himself testified, that “he was a perfect and upright man.” And if *he* could not justify himself before God, who are *we*, that *we* should presume to do so? Are we more perfect than he? Hear how he speaks of himself, a few verses after our text¹; and then see what our views of ourselves should be. Nor was Job singular in his views of himself: the language of all the most eminent saints, both in the Old and New Testament, is precisely similar² — — — And such must be ours also, if ever we would find mercy at the hands of God: we must “humble ourselves, if ever we would be exalted.”]

2. For our consolation—

[Some are discouraged at the sight of their own vileness, and are ready to think that such unworthy creatures as they can never be saved. And such thoughts they might well have, if justification were, either in whole or in part, by any righteousness of our own. But “we are to be justified freely by God’s grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus¹”: it is “*the ungodly* whom God justifies²”; not indeed those who *continue* ungodly, but those who come to Christ in an ungodly state, desiring to be cleansed from the guilt and power of their sins: those persons are justified the very moment they believe in Jesus, and *that* too from all the sins they have ever committed³. Here indeed is abundant consolation for “the weary and heavy-laden” sinner; here indeed he may find rest to his soul. Remember then what the Apostle has said; “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners:” and that Paul himself, when he was a bloody persecutor and blasphemer, obtained mercy, on purpose that the extent and riches of God’s grace might be displayed in him, as a pattern and encouragement to all who should ever desire acceptance with their offended God⁴. Follow his example then, and believe in Jesus for the remission of your sins: say, as the prophet encourages you to do, “In the Lord Jesus have I righteousness and strength;” for “in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and in him shall they glory⁵.” The very name by which the Lord Jesus himself delights to be called, is, “The Lord our Righteousness⁶.”]

¹ ver. 30, 31.

² See Ps. cxxx. 3. and cxliii. 2. Prov. xx. 9. Isai. vi. 5. and lxiv. 6. Phil. iii. 4—9. and especially 1 Cor. iv. 4.

³ Rom. iii. 24—26.

⁴ Rom. iv. 5.

⁵ Acts xiii. 39.

⁶ 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

⁷ Isai. xlv. 24, 25.

⁸ Jer. xxiii. 6.

CCCCLX.

IMPATIENCE REPROVED.

Job x. 1. *My soul is weary of my life.*

LIFE is justly esteemed a blessing: and we are properly taught in the Liturgy to thank God, as well for our creation, as for our preservation, and redemption. But to the greater part of mankind this world is a chequered scene at best; and to very many it is only a vale of tears. Had we seen Job in his prosperity, we should have been led perhaps to form a more favourable estimate of the present state: but there are changes in the affairs of men, as much as in the air and seas: and the day that dawned with the most promising appearance, may be overcast with clouds, and blackened with tempests, ere the sun has reached its meridian height. Thus it was with Job: the man that was the envy of all who knew him, was in a short space of time so reduced, as to exclaim, “My soul is weary of my life.”

We shall,

I. Shew that this is a common experience—

Daily observation proves that it is common,

1. Among the ungodly—

[It arises from *domestic* trials. Who can tell what trouble a tyrannical or unfaithful husband, a contentious or imprudent wife, a rebellious or extravagant son, an indiscreet or unchaste daughter, may occasion? There is scarce a family to be found, where something does not happen to embitter life, and to make death, either to the head or members, an object of desire.

From *personal* troubles also the same disquietude will spring. *Pain and sickness*, when of long continuance, and especially when accompanied with the infirmities of age, cause many to wish for a speedy dissolution. Embarrassed circumstances too will so oppress the spirits, particularly when occasioned by one's own extravagance or folly, as to make the soul weary of life: yea, to such a degree are the minds of men oppressed by troubles of this kind, that a deliverance from them is not unfrequently sought in suicide. Even a mere sense of the emptiness

of all earthly things will often fill the soul with disgust, and cause it to sigh for a release from the body, in which it finds no satisfactory enjoyment. Many, in the midst of youth, health, and affluence, while moving in a constant round of amusements, and free from every external trouble, are yet so weary of life, that they would gladly part with it immediately, if they were not afraid of entering into the invisible world. But, above all, a *guilty conscience* renders man "a burthen to himself." A person "weary and heavy-laden" with a sense of sin, and not knowing where to go for rest, is indeed a pitiable object. He wishes that he had never been born, or that he could be again reduced to a state of non-existence. If he might but be annihilated like the beasts, he would gladly accept the offer, and most thankfully forego all hope of heaven, to obtain deliverance from the fears of hell.]

2. Among the godly—

[Not even the most eminent saints are altogether free from this experience. They are not, whilst in the flesh, above the reach of *temporal* afflictions. They are not indeed overcome by every little trouble, like those who know not God: but they are not insensible to pain or pleasure: they have their feelings, as well as other men. Pains of body, loss of substance, bereavements of friends, injuries from enemies, may, when accumulated, cast them down; and produce, as in the case of Job, extreme dejection.

The weight of *spiritual* troubles is felt by these exclusively: nor can those who have never experienced their pressure, form any just conception respecting them. Who can describe the anguish that is occasioned by *violent temptations, headstrong corruptions, unsuccessful conflicts*? What language can paint the distress of a soul under *the hidings of God's face*, and the apprehensions of his wrath? Can we wonder that a person long exercised with such trials, should say, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest^a?" Surely "the spirit of a man may sustain other infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear^b?"]

The commonness of this experience may well lead us to,

II. Inquire into the reasons of it—

Many reasons may be assigned, but we shall limit ourselves to a few:

1. Impatience—

^a Ps. lv. 4—6.

^b Prov. xviii. 14.

[Job, whose patience is celebrated even by God himself, when borne down by the weight of his afflictions, cursed the day of his birth^c, and longed exceedingly for death^d; and would have been glad to have had a period put to his existence, even by strangling, rather than to have it protracted any longer in such misery^e. To the same source we must trace those hasty wishes, which we also are ready to form in seasons of great calamity. If "patience had its perfect work in us," we should be willing to bear whatever God might see fit to lay upon us. But "in the day of adversity the strongest of us are too apt to faint."]

2. Unbelief—

[From this more particularly arose that weariness and aversion to life which the Prophet Elijah manifested, when he fled from Jezebel. He had encountered Ahab, and slain all the prophets of Baal, in dependence on the divine protection: but when this wicked woman menaced him, he stayed not to take counsel of the Lord, but instantly fled into the wilderness; and, to get rid of all his dangers and difficulties at once, requested God to kill him^f. Had he felt the same security in God as on former occasions, he would have been quite composed, knowing assuredly that without God's permission not a hair of his head could fall to the ground. Thus when afflictions render us weary of life, we shew that we have forgotten the promise of Jehovah to make all things work together for our good. When we know that medicine is operating for our good, we disregard the uneasiness that it occasions: we are contented even to pay for the prescriptions, from a confidence that we shall be benefited by them in the issue. And should we not welcome the prescriptions of our heavenly Physician, if we duly considered his unerring wisdom, goodness, and truth? Instead of repining and murmuring on account of his dispensations, we should rest satisfied, that every additional trouble would only call forth additional displays of his power and love.]

3. A forgetfulness of our real desert—

[Man, as a sinner, deserves the curse of the law, and the wrath of God. Suppose we bore this in mind, should we not say, even under the most accumulated trials, "Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve^g?" Would not a recollection of our desert of death and hell constrain us to cry, "Shall a *living* man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins^h?" Would Jonah have been so clamorous for death,

^c Job iii. 1—22.

^d Job vi. 8, 9.

^e Job vii. 15, 16.

^f 1 Kings xix. 4.

^g Ezra ix. 13.

^h Lam. iii. 39.

and so ready to justify his impatience before Godⁱ, if he had considered what he merited at God's hands? So neither should we be so fretful under our sufferings, if only we bore in mind, that, instead of being put into the furnace of affliction, we should, if dealt with according to our deserts, be cast into the flames of hell. We should learn rather to adopt the sentiment of the Church of old, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him^k."]]

4. A disregard of the great ends of life—

[It is truly humiliating to find not only such querulous, and almost doubtful, characters as Jonah, but the bold Elijah, the pious David, the patient Job, fainting in their trials, and longing for their dismissal from the body. But to this catalogue we must add another, even Moses, the meekest of mankind. Even this holy man, unable to bear up under the burthens imposed upon him, complains of them to God, and says, "If thou deal thus with me, I pray thee to kill me out of hand^l." Would he have offered such a petition if he had reflected on the benefits which had already accrued to Israel by his means, and, humanly speaking, the incalculable loss which they would sustain by his removal? And should not we also be more willing to endure our trials, if we considered what valuable ends might be promoted by our continuance under them? Perhaps we are not prepared to die; (for persons are most apt to wish for death when they are least prepared to meet it;) and would we, for the sake of extricating ourselves from some earthly trouble, plunge ourselves, both body and soul, into the everlasting miseries of hell? But, supposing that we are prepared, may not others be greatly edified by our example, our counsels, and our prayers? May not our own weight of glory also be greatly increased, by a due improvement of our light and momentary afflictions^m? Is not this last consideration alone sufficient to reconcile us to a prolonging of our troubles, and a deferring of our heavenly felicityⁿ? We may indeed be in a strait betwixt the two; but we shall, like St. Paul, be willing to live, when we reflect how much better that may be both for ourselves and others^o.]

ⁱ Jonah iv. 2, 3, 8, 9.

^k Mic. vii. 9.

^l Numb. xi. 14, 15.

^m 2 Cor. iv. 17.

ⁿ For this sublime idea the author is in a measure indebted to a poor woman (so poor as to be supported by the parish), who, when in great pain, and almost in dying circumstances, replied (in answer to what he had suggested respecting the rest and happiness that awaited her), "True, Sir, but *in some respects affliction is better even than heaven itself*; for, &c. &c."

^o Phil. i. 23, 24.

Towards lessening this common evil, we shall,

III. Prescribe some remedies for it—

The painful experience before described may be mitigated, and in many cases wholly prevented, by,

1. A due attention to our worldly callings—

[Persons under the pressure of heavy afflictions are apt to give themselves up to sorrow, and to neglect the proper duties of their calling. By this means their minds become more and more enervated; their spirits sink, and they fall a prey to their sorrows: they die of a broken heart. But if, instead of thus yielding to lowness of spirits, they would employ themselves in their accustomed duties, their occupations would divert their attention from their troubles, and give scope and opportunity to the mind to recover its proper tone. Whether the troubles be of a temporal or spiritual nature, this remedy should be applied. We must not indeed go and plunge ourselves into business or amusement in order to get rid of reflection, (*that* would be to run into a contrary extreme;) but we should never be so occupied with our sufferings as to forget or neglect our duties. It is remarkable, that when God repeated to the fugitive prophet that expostulatory question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" he ordered him, not to sit any longer wishing for death, but to go about the business which yet remained for him to do; namely, to return to Damascus, and anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, and Jehu to be king of Israel, and Elisha to be his successor in the prophetic office^p. And in the same manner it becomes us, not to sit wishing for the spoils of victory, but to continue fighting till God shall call us to put off our armour.]

2. A close walk with God—

[Strange it is, that heavy trials which are sent to bring us to God, often prevail rather to drive us *from* him. We complain, "We are so overwhelmed with trouble, that we cannot think of our souls or compose our minds for supplication to God." But we are particularly commanded to "call on God *in the time of trouble*^q;" and to "cast all our care upon Him, who careth for us^r:" and we see in the instance of St. Paul how speedily our sorrows might be turned into joy, if only we would use this remedy^s. Surely one ray of the light of his countenance would dissipate all our darkness, and change our impatient murmurings into "thanksgiving and the voice of melody." If we were bowed down with a sense of guilt, one

^p 1 Kings xix. 15, 16.

^r 1 Pet. v. 7.

^q Ps. l. 15.

^s 2 Cor. xii. 7—10.

glimpse of Christ would remove the load from our conscience. If we were harassed with the fiercest temptations or most overwhelming fears, one word from him would quiet the tempestuous ocean, and qualify us for encountering all the storms wherewith we might at any time be overtaken.]

3. A frequent survey of heaven—

[A view of heaven would indeed excite desires after the full enjoyment of it. But this is very different from the experience which is described in the text. Our longings after heaven cannot be too ardent, provided we are contented to wait God's time in order to possess it^t. This is an important distinction, and most accurately marked by the Apostle Paul. He knew that heaven was the portion prepared for him; and he earnestly desired to enjoy it^u: but these desires did not spring from an impatient wish to get rid of his troubles, or to terminate his conflicts, but from a thirst after God himself, and the perfect fruition of his glory^x. Now *this* would be a most effectual remedy against the other: the brighter the views we had of the glory that awaits us, the less we should regard the sufferings of this present time^y. If the years of labour and servitude appeared to Jacob only as a few days, because of the love he bore to Rachel, and the desire he had to possess her as his wife^z, so will the tribulations which are appointed as our way to the kingdom^a appear of little concern, when we look to the end of our journey, and the felicity we shall then enjoy.]

^t 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^y Rom. viii. 18.

^u 2 Cor. v. 1—3.

^z Gen. xxix. 20.

^x 2 Cor. v. 4.

^a Acts xiv. 22.

CCCC LXI.

CONSCIOUS INTEGRITY.

Job x. 7. *Thou knowest that I am not wicked.*

PAINFUL as the consideration of God's omniscience must be to the wicked, it is a rich source of consolation to those who are upright before him. Circumstances may arise, wherein they may not be able fully to vindicate their character to the world, even though they are perfectly innocent of the things laid to their charge. The defilement also which they sometimes contract by reason of their indwelling corruptions may be such as to excite fears respecting the state of their souls; while they are maintaining

a strenuous conflict with the whole body of sin. In such cases it will be a satisfaction to them to reflect, that their very inmost souls are naked and open before God; and that he can discern the integrity of their hearts, even when most clouded, either by unreasonable suspicions, or just occasions of doubt. From this source Job drew his consolation, when the dispensations of Providence seemed to justify his friends in accusing him of hypocrisy: he could then appeal to God, and say, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked."

We propose to shew,

I. What we are to understand by this appeal—

Job never intended to assert that he was possessed of sinless perfection—

[God had indeed honoured him with the title of a "perfect man." But in the very same place, the import of the term "perfect" is limited and explained by the word "upright" united to it^a. Perfection, in the Scripture use of the word, relates rather to our desires than our attainments; and denotes that growth in grace, which is found in those who have arrived at the full stature of a Christian, as distinguished from a state of infantine weakness, or youthful inexperience. That Job did not deny himself to be a sinner, or still to be encompassed with sinful infirmities, is evident from the whole of the preceding context, where he repeatedly acknowledges, and deeply bewails, his own depravity^b. Indeed his spirit at this time was by no means free from sinful impatience^c; so that, if he had boasted of sinless perfection, he would have opposed the whole tenor of Scripture^d, and his own mouth would have condemned him, and proved him perverse.]

But he appealed to God,

1. That he was free from the sin imputed to him—

[Job's friends imagined, that heavy judgments were never sent except as punishments of some enormous wickedness. What evils Job had been guilty of, they could not tell: but, as they saw him so grievously afflicted, they concluded that he must have indulged some secret wickedness, which God now intended to disclose and punish. They therefore, at a venture,

^a Job i. 8.

^b Job vii. 20. and ix. 20, 21, 30, 31.

^c ver. 3.

^d 1 Kings viii. 46. Jam. iii. 2. 1 John i. 8.

accused him of hypocrisy^e. But he repelled the charge, and asserted, in opposition to them, his own innocence^f.]

2. That he was, on the whole, upright before God—

[He had unfeignedly endeavoured to serve and please God; nor did his conscience accuse him of allowedly indulging sin. In hopes therefore that the solemnity of an appeal to God would convince and satisfy his friends, he presumed to address the Deity in the words of our text. Nor was this without an evident propriety: for, as the troubles which proceeded from God were considered as a testimony against him, he could not clear himself better than by appealing to the Author of those troubles for a testimony in his favour. To have done this merely to cover his guilt, would have been madness: for if he was already suffering the rebukes of God on account of his hypocrisy, he could expect nothing but a ten-fold load of misery as the reward of such aggravated impiety. Such an appeal therefore to the heart-searching God, upon a subject of which none but God could judge, was the best, and indeed the only means, of re-establishing his character in the good opinion of his friends.]

But, that we may not be too hasty in making such an appeal, let us consider,

II. What is necessary to warrant it —

We ought to have the testimony of our own conscience,

1. That we are free from all allowed sin—

[If we allow ourselves in any sin, we are servants of sin^g; we belong to Satan^h; we have no interest in the covenant of graceⁱ; yea, even the prayers we offer in such a state are an abomination to the Lord^k. It matters not whether the sin be open or secret, great or small; if we indulge it willingly, we oppose the authority of God, which is equally displayed in every commandment. It is no excuse to say, that such or such an indulgence is conducive to our comfort, or necessary to our welfare: if it be as useful as a right hand, or as precious as a right eye, we can never be sincere, if we do not pluck it out or cut it off, and cast it from us^l. In order to say with truth,

^e Job viii. 13, 14, 20.

^f David did the same. See Ps. vii. 3, 8. and xxvi. 1, 6. And Paul: see 1 Thess. ii. 10.

^g Rom. vi. 16.

^h 1 John iii. 8.

ⁱ Rom. vi. 14.

^k Ps. lxvi. 18. Prov. xxviii. 9.

^l Matt. v. 29, 30.

"I am not wicked," we must have "a single eye^m," and be Israelites indeed, without guileⁿ.]

2. That we endeavour habitually to approve ourselves to God—

[We may approve ourselves to our fellow-creatures, while there is much iniquity harboured in our hearts. If we would have a good conscience, we must act, not to men, but to God: God's will must be the reason, his word the rule, and his glory the end, of our obedience^o. We must have as much respect to our motives and inclinations as to our words and actions; we must be careful to purge out all leaven^p, and to have the very thoughts of our hearts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ^q. Without this we cannot say, "I am not wicked;" for that which is the root and summit of all wickedness abides within us: we have "a carnal mind that is enmity against God^r:" and however clean we may be in the outward appearance, we are inwardly like whited sepulchres, full of rottenness and all uncleanness^s.]

But in proportion to the difficulty of making this appeal is,

III. The blessedness of being able to make it—

Certainly such a consciousness of our own integrity must be a rich consolation to us,

1. Under any troubles that may come upon us—

[Under the pressure of any heavy calamity, when God seems as if he were "bringing our sins to remembrance," and especially in times of persecution, when our characters are traduced, and we are regarded as the most worthless of mankind, we find it a most painful addition to our grief if we think that we have brought the trial on ourselves by some misconduct of our own. But if, in either of these cases, we can appeal to God that we have sought only his glory, and endeavoured to approve ourselves to him, we shall feel our trials greatly alleviated, and our spirits calmed. Never was a man more cruelly aspersed, or more virulently persecuted, than the Apostle Paul: yet the reflection that God knew his heart, and approved his conduct, made it appear "a light matter to him to be judged of man's judgment^t." A similar consciousness will be productive of similar composure in all our minds^u.]

^m Matt. vi. 22.

ⁿ John i. 47.

^o Col. iii. 23.

^p Luke xii. 1. 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

^q 2 Cor. x. 5.

^r Rom. viii. 7.

^s Matt. xxiii. 27, 28.

^t 1 Cor. iv. 3.

^u 2 Cor. i. 12.

2. In the prospect of death and judgment—

[None who have guilt upon their conscience can look forward to these seasons without pain and dread. But to him who can make this appeal to God, death and judgment have lost all their terrors. He has within himself an earnest of the felicity that awaits him. The judgment has already passed, as it were, with respect to him; and, while others have only a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume them, he “knows that he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens^x.” Not being condemned in his own heart, he has a just and Scriptural confidence towards God^y.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are living in any known sin—

[Perhaps you have contrived so well, that you can defy man to lay any particular evil to your charge. But what will that avail, while God beholds the secret abominations of your hearts? To what purpose is it to say to your fellow-creatures, “Ye cannot accuse me,” when you are constrained to confess before God, “Thou knowest that I am wicked?” Reflect on the strictness of the trial that awaits you; and know, that God will bring every secret thing into judgment, whether it be good or evil^z.]

2. Those who think themselves in a good state—

[It is by no means uncommon for men to “deceive themselves, by thinking themselves something when they are nothing^a.” The way to prevent this is, to take the word of God as the standard by which we try ourselves; and, to beg of God to search and try us. This is recommended by St. Paul, in order that we may have rejoicing in ourselves alone, and not merely in the good opinion of others^b. If indeed we have in ourselves an evidence that we truly love and fear God, we may say, with Peter, “Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee^c.” But, after all, we should remember, that, whatever be our estimate of our own character, “Not he who commendeth himself shall be approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth^d.”]

^x 2 Cor. v. 1.

^y 1 John iii. 19—21.

^z 1 Cor. iv. 4, 5. with the first clause of Job x. 15.

^a Gal. vi. 3.

^b Gal. vi. 4, 5.

^c John xxi. 17.

^d 2 Cor. x. 18.

CCCCLXII.

THE INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF GOD.

Job xi. 7—12. *Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. If he cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him? For he knoweth vain men: he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it? For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt^a.*

WE are not a little grieved to see a good man, under circumstances that should have called forth nothing but tenderness and compassion, run down and persecuted by his own friends, and those friends men of great intelligence and real piety. But human nature, notwithstanding it may have been renovated by divine grace, is still imperfect: and, if left under the influence of any mistaken principle, we may pursue evil with earnestness under the semblance of good, and may provoke God to anger, whilst we imagine that we are rendering him the most acceptable service. The friends of Job were eminently enlightened men: yet all in succession act towards him the part of enemies; and each in succession, with increasing acrimony, condemns him as a hypo-

^a Perhaps it might be better to take only ver. 7. and 8. for the text, and to leave out the second head of this Discourse. In that case, *the subject* will be 'The Incomprehensibility of God;' and *the great divisions* of it will be those which are found in the first head in this Discourse. Then the *IMPROVEMENT* of the subject might be, to *LEARN*, 1st, To receive with meekness whatever God has revealed: (and there ver. 12. might be introduced :) 2dly, To bear with patience whatever he may inflict: (where *the inefficacy*, ver. 11. and *the danger*, ver. 12. of contending with God are stated :) and 3dly, To be thankful especially for the discovery he has given of himself in the person of his dear Son. Here it might be shewn, that God, though still incomprehensible, has given the fullest discoveries of himself. Christ is expressly called "the image of the invisible God;" and "Whosoever has seen him, has seen the Father." In his cross, all the perfections of the Father are illustrated and glorified (Ps. lxxxv. 1.); and by the help of his Spirit (2 Cor. iv. 6.) we may discover them.

crite before God. How painful is it to hear this address of Zophar; "Should thy *lies* make men hold their peace? and when thou *mockest*, shall no man make thee ashamed^b?" But, whilst we lament the sad misapplication of their arguments to the point in hand, and the bitterness of spirit with which they were urged, we must still avail ourselves of the instruction they afford us, which in some respects is equal to any that is contained in the sacred volume.

Zophar supposed, that Job had complained of God as acting unjustly towards him: and, if he had been right in his interpretation of Job's expressions, the reproof he administered would have been just and salutary. His error in relation to Job's real character divests his observations of all force in reference to him: but they deserve the strictest attention in reference to ourselves. From them we are naturally led to notice,

I. The incomprehensibility of God—

Well does David say, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable." Truly he is unsearchable,

1. In the perfections of his nature—

[Men will often talk of God, and lay down laws for him, just as if they had the most perfect knowledge of him, and of every thing relating to him. But our knowledge of God is altogether *negative*: we know that he is *not* unwise, *not* unholy, *not* unjust; but, as to any *definite* ideas of his attributes, we have them not. What notion have we of his natural perfections of eternity or immensity? None at all. So of his moral perfections, of justice, mercy, goodness, truth, we, in fact, know as little. We contemplate these qualities as existing in man, and are enabled to estimate with some precision their proper bearings: but, when we come to transfer these qualities to the Deity, we are much in the dark: and we are guilty of great presumption, when we prescribe rules for him, and bind him by laws that are suited for the restrictions of human actions. "He dwells in the light which no man can approach unto:" and presumptuously to ascend the mount of his habitation, or to look within the ark, is death^d.]

^b ver. 3.

^c Ps. cxlv. 3.

^d Exod. xix. 12, 13. 1 Sam. vi. 19.

2. In the dispensations of his providence—

[These we see ; but no one of them do we understand*. Who will pretend to account for God's conduct towards our first parents, in suffering them to be overcome by temptation, and to entail sin and misery on all their posterity? Who will undertake to declare all the consequences that may arise from any one event, however trivial, or all the motives which exist in the divine mind for the permission of it? We are apt to speak of things as great and small, because of the degree of importance that we attach to them: but there is nothing great, nothing small, in the estimation of God: and whoever meditates on the history of Joseph, or the facts recorded in the Book of Esther, will see, that the most casual and trifling circumstances, as they appear to us, were as important links in the chain of providence, as those which bear the clearer marks of counsel and design. The rejection of the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, and the restoration of the Jews to the favour of their God, are events of vast magnitude in human estimation: but what the Apostle says in reference to them, is in reality as applicable to the events of daily occurrence, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"]

3. In the operations of his grace—

[Let that first act of grace be surveyed, the destination of God's only dear Son to be the surety and substitute of man: let the whole covenant of grace be contemplated: let every act of grace from the foundation of the world to this present moment be scrutinized: and what shall we know of it all? Let it be inquired, why God puts a difference between one nation and another, and between one individual and another: let the mode in which divine grace operates upon the soul be investigated, so as to distinguish in all things the agency of the Holy Spirit from the actings of our own minds: Who is sufficient for these things? Who is not a child and a fool in his own estimation, when he turns his attention to them? We would address our text to every child of man; "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out." "As no man knoweth the things of a man, but the

* This was as strongly affirmed by Job himself as by his friends. Compare Job v. 9. and ix. 10. with the text.

† Rom. xi. 33.

‡ Job xxxvii. 23.

spirit of man which is in him; so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God^h."]

If God be so incomprehensible, then we may see,

II. The folly of presuming to sit in judgment upon him—

This was the particular drift of Zophar's admonition. He conceived that Job had complained of God as unjust towards him: and therefore, having solemnly warned Job, that "God had exacted less of him than his iniquities deserved," he proceeded to dilate upon the character and ways of God as far exceeding all human comprehension, and to shew unto Job the folly of arraigning the conduct of the Most High. In prosecution of his argument, Zophar shews,

1. How incompetent we are to resist his will—

[God is almighty: and, if he is pleased "to cut off" a man's family, "or to shut him up" in darkness and distress, "or to gather together" his adversaries against him, "what power has any man to hinder him?" We may dispute against him; but we cannot divert him from his purpose: we may complain and murmur; but "we cannot stay his hand." "He doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth:" and, "whatever his counsel may be, that shall stand." What folly then is it to be indulging hard thoughts of him, and to be maintaining a stoutness of heart against him, when we know beforehand that we can never prevail, that we only kick against the pricks, and that the only way of averting his wrath is, to humble ourselves before him! Think, all ye who now repine, "Will your hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with you? or will you thunder with a voice like his?"]

2. How unable we are to escape his judgment—

[God sees all the rebellious motions of our hearts, and will certainly call us into judgment for them. Here then is a strong additional reason for not presuming to condemn him. To know that the indulgence of such a rebellious spirit will not avert his displeasure, were quite sufficient to suppress all risings of heart against him: but to know that it greatly augments his displeasure; to know that he marks every rebellious thought that springs up in our minds, and "that he *considers*

^h 1 Cor. ii. 11.

it" with a view to a just and awful retribution; surely this should make us extremely cautious how we thus ensure and aggravate our eternal condemnation. On this subject we shall do well to remember the warning which God himself gave to Job; "He that reproveth God, let him answer it!"]

3. How destitute we are of every thing that can qualify us for such an office—

[What is any man, "vain man, that would be wise?" What? "He is born" as stupid, as unteachable, and as refractory "as a wild ass's colt^k." Were he of the first order of created intelligences, he could know nothing of God any further than God was pleased to reveal himself to him: but he is a being of an inferior order, and *that* too in a fallen and degraded state; "having the eyes of his understanding darkened" by sin, and "blinded by the god of this world;" yea more, having also a thick impenetrable "veil over his heart." What then can *such* a creature pretend to know of God, that he should presume to sit in judgment upon *him*, and to arraign *his* conduct? We know how incompetent a little child would be to comprehend and sit in judgment upon the designs of a great statesman; yet is there no distance between those, in comparison of *that* which exists between God and us. Let us bear in mind then what we ourselves are; and that will most effectually repress our arrogance, if we be tempted to judge of God.]

As the obvious IMPROVEMENT of this subject, let us learn,

1. To receive with meekness whatever God has revealed—

[We are no more to sit in judgment upon God's word than upon his providence: if once it be ascertained that the word is a revelation from God, then are we to receive it with the simplicity of a little child. We must indeed use all possible means to attain a clear knowledge of the meaning of the Scripture, as well as to assure ourselves that it is of divine origin: but we must not wrest the word, and put an unnatural construction upon it, because we do not fully comprehend it: we must rather look up to God for the teachings of his Spirit, and wait upon him till he shall be pleased to "open our understandings to understand the Scriptures." Did we act thus, setting ourselves against no truth that God has revealed, but receiving with humility whatever he has spoken, we should no longer behold the Church rent into parties, and the minds of men embittered against each other by controversies. Let us

ⁱ Job xl. 2.

^k See Jer. ii. 23, 24.

remember, that "the riches of Christ are unsearchable;" that "his love passeth knowledge;" and that however deep our knowledge of Scripture may be, there will always remain some things difficult to be understood: and our wisdom is, first, to improve for our benefit all that is clear; and then, in reference to the rest, to say, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter."]

2. To bear with patience whatever God has inflicted—

[Impatience does, in fact, reflect upon God either as unjust or unkind. But if we considered how "little a portion is heard of him," that "his footsteps are not known," and that those things which we deplore as calamities are sent by him in love for our eternal good, we should not only submit with patience to whatever he might lay upon us, but should adore him for it as an expression of his love. The issue of Job's trials is proposed to us in this very view, as the means of composing our minds, and of reconciling us to the most afflictive providences¹. If Job were now to live on earth again, and were to see all the benefit that has resulted both to himself and to the Church, and all the glory that has redounded to his God from the troubles that he endured, how differently would he speak of them, from what he did when under their immediate pressure! What he has seen of God's unerring wisdom and unbounded love would make him justify God, yea and glorify him too, for all those trials which once he felt so insupportable: and, if we now by faith learn to estimate the divine character aright, we shall welcome every dispensation however afflictive, and glory in our present troubles, under the sweet assurance, that "our light shall ere long rise in obscurity, and our darkness be as the noon-day."]

¹ Jam. v. 11.

CCCCCLXIII.

A WANT OF SYMPATHY CONDEMNED.

Job xii. 5. *He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease.*

THE friends of Job meant well: but, mistaking utterly his case, all that they spoke, though good in itself, was irrelevant, and tended only to aggravate his sorrows, which it was their professed intention to alleviate. The injustice of their remarks generated

in him somewhat of tartness and asperity; though, considering how cruel and unjust their reflections were, we wonder not that his vindications of himself should assume somewhat of that character. But, passing by his ironical reprehension of them^a, I would call your attention to the complaint which he utters in the words which I have just read. It was a just complaint, as it respected *them*: and it contains a truth, which is confirmed by universal experience.

To mark the precise import of Job's expressions, I will set before you,

I. The evil complained of—

Job did not intend to deny that his friends were possessed of humanity, or to say that kind dispositions might not be found even in ungodly men: for, where distress is great and visible, and within the reach of common remedies, there are many who will find a pleasure in relieving it. It was not *this* which Job designed to controvert. To enter into the full meaning of his words, we must distinctly notice,

1. The terms in which the evil is expressed—

[The afflicted person is described as "one who is ready to slip with his feet." Now, this is not the case with persons in common afflictions. It refers to those only whose afflictions are of a peculiarly dark, complicated nature, contrary to the common course of things, or, at all events, contrary to what, according to the usual dispensations of Providence, might have been expected. These trials lead a person to complain of God himself, and to question the justice and goodness of his dealings with them. Such was the state of Asaph, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked, and compared it with the afflicted lot of God's own faithful servants. He said, "As for me, *my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped*: for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." Then he adds, "Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence^b." Here, by reason of his trouble, this good man was ready to think that it was altogether in vain to serve the Lord.

Now, such a person meets with little compassion from those who have never experienced any similar affliction: "he is as a lamp despised, in the thought of him that is at

^a ver. 2.

^b Ps. lxxiii. 2, 3, 13.

ease." The man that is at ease in his circumstances and in his mind, cannot enter into the feelings of one who is thus dejected. He therefore looks upon the sufferer just as a man, after the sun is risen, looks upon a lamp in the street, from which he can reap no benefit, and about which he feels no concern. He will not get a ladder, in order to trim it; nor will he put himself to the expense of oil to supply it; nor does he care how soon it is extinguished, provided only that he himself be not annoyed by its smell. Like the priest and Levite in the parable, he passes by such a sufferer with unconcern, instead of getting oil and wine to pour into, and to mollify, his wounds.

This leads us to a just view of,]

2. The evil itself—

[Job was in such circumstances as his friends could not at all account for: yea, and he himself too was ready to complain of God, as acting unjustly and unmercifully towards him. Hence his friends, who came with a good design to comfort him, expressed in reality no compassion towards him, nor seemed to feel any concern, even though, by their unkind insinuations, they should drive him to despair. They did, indeed, give him good advice, on a supposition he was a hypocrite chastised of God for some secret and enormous wickedness: but, for a saint, placed in the furnace, by a wise and merciful Refiner, for his own good, and the good of all to whom his history should in future ages be made known, there was not, in all their advice, one word of comfort, or encouragement, or support. They themselves, never having been involved in such trouble, could not understand his case. When he shined as the sun in his prosperity, they could avail themselves of his light, and bask with pleasure in his beams: but, now that he was under so thick a cloud, they regarded him only "as a despised lamp," which, having been shorn of its lustre, was left to be extinguished in utter darkness.

And such is the treatment generally given to persons circumstanced as Job was. Their sorrows being so little appreciated, they find but little sympathy. Even good people know not how to meet their case, or what to say for their relief. The blow, which has struck down the sufferer, has stunned and stupified those who, under less complicated afflictions, might have been able to administer to him: and hence he is, for the most part, left without those compassionate attentions which his sorrows require, and perhaps is regarded as one whose troubles admit not of any consolation, and of whose restoration to happiness there is no hope.]

This evil prevailing so generally, I will endeavour to shew,

II. The state of mind which it betrays—

Certainly it denotes,

1. A want of Christian knowledge—

[By Christian knowledge I mean, emphatically, the knowledge of Christ Jesus, and of all the wonders of redeeming love. Doubtless, a speculative knowledge of the Gospel a man may have, and yet be a stranger to the tender feelings of sympathy in such a case as this: (for even the devils possess a speculative knowledge of the Gospel, to a great extent:) but a practical and influential knowledge he possesses not. How can he ever have duly contemplated the compassions of Almighty God towards our fallen race? Can he have ever been impressed with the Father's love towards us *rebellious creatures*, and yet feel no pity towards a suffering *brother*? What sense can he have of the tender mercies of our Lord, when he undertook to assume our fallen nature on purpose that he might "bear in his own sacred person our sins, and, by bearing, take away from us, for ever, our iniquities?" What, I say, can he know of the length and breadth and depth and height of this immeasurable love, and remain insensible to the wants and miseries of others? I may further add, What can he know of "the love of the Holy Spirit" towards us, in undertaking for us the office of "a Comforter," and dwelling in our polluted bosoms, as in a temple, for the express purpose of administering consolation to us, and of perfecting in us the work which the Father planned, and the Son executed, and which He, the third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, applies? When all this love has been shewn to us on purpose to generate in us a similar love towards each other^d, what can he know of this stupendous mystery, who displays it not in its effects? If it be true respecting those who sympathize not with others in their bodily necessities, that "they have not the love of God in them^e," much more is it true, that they who "shut up their bowels of compassion from a brother" under the pressure of spiritual troubles, can possess but little knowledge of that mystery which unites all in one body, and causes every member to participate in the feelings and necessities of the whole body^f.]

2. A want of Christian experience—

[Some find comparatively few conflicts in the divine life: others have to maintain a severe warfare, by which they are often reduced to great straits. Now, it is to these latter that I refer, when I speak of Christian experience. It is by no

^e Isai. liii. 4.

^f 1 John iii. 17.

^d John xv. 12, 13. Eph. v. 2.

^f 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.

means uncommon for persons, at their first awakening, to be bowed down with fear and terrible apprehensions of the divine displeasure. It was thus with the first converts on the day of Pentecost: "they were pricked to the heart; and cried out in great agony of soul, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" In subsequent stages of the divine life, too, many are brought into deep waters, where, like David, they are apprehensive of being swallowed up, and utterly destroyed^g. They "pass through fire and through water^h;" and if they were not succoured from on high by more than ordinary communications of grace, they would sink and perish. Now, these persons can enter into the feelings of others who are cast down by reason of their afflictions; and can suggest to them many suitable reflections, such as perhaps the angels suggested to our Lord, when tempted in the wildernessⁱ, and when agonizing in the garden of Gethsemane^k. But the man who has no sympathy with persons under such circumstances, shews, that he knows but little either of temptations or deliverances; since these deep experiences are vouchsafed to some for the express purpose, that they may thereby be both qualified and disposed to administer to others the consolations with which they themselves "are comforted of God^l."]

3. A want of Christian feeling—

[The very essence of Christianity is love: and it is "by bearing one another's burthens that we very principally fulfil the law of Christ^m." But how can we fulfil that law, if we do not "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weepⁿ?" Or how can we possess "true and undefiled religion, if we do not visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction^o," and endeavour, according to our ability, to "lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees, and to make straight and smooth paths^p" for "the feet of those who are ready to slip?" It was peculiarly characteristic of our blessed Lord, that "he would not break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, till he should bring forth judgment unto victory^q;" and, if we do not resemble him in his compassionate regard for his afflicted saints, whatever we may profess, "we have not the mind that was in Christ Jesus^r."]

BEHOLD, then,

1. The benefit of affliction—

["Affliction, doubtless, is not joyous, but grievous:" but

^g Ps. lxix. 2.

^h Isai. xliii. 2.

ⁱ Matt. iv. 11.

^k Luke xxii. 43.

^l 2 Cor. i. 4—6.

^m Gal. vi. 2.

ⁿ Rom. xii. 15.

^o Jam. i. 27.

^p Heb. xii. 12, 13.

^q Isai. xlii. 3.

^r Phil. ii. 5.

it qualifies us for services for which we should be otherwise unfit. Our blessed Lord was tempted in all things like unto us, sin only excepted, *on purpose* that he might be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and be qualified (so to speak) "to succour them that are tempted^a:" and from that very consideration we are encouraged to come to him for relief under our troubles^c. Shall we not, then, be content to learn, in the school of adversity, the lessons which he designs us to convey to others? We doubt not but that Job, if he were on earth again, and knew how many millions of souls his example has instructed, would readily submit again to the same discipline, in order to communicate the same blessings to mankind. And we also may well descend with David into the horrible pit and miry clay of despondency itself, if only, with him, we may have "a new song put into our mouth, which many, beholding, may fear, and put their trust in the Lord^d."]

2. The excellency of the Gospel—

[Under the gospel dispensation we have a perfect antidote to all the afflictions even of Job himself. We have a far greater insight into the nature of God's dispensations than they had under the darker ministration of the Law. The compassions of Christ do, in fact, dispel every cloud; and bring such light into the soul, that it may be said of all who view them aright, "Unto the godly there ariseth up light in the darkness^e:" and every believing soul may say, "When I walk in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me^f." Yes, Brethren, "there is balm in Gilead;" there is balm for every wound. Only study the Gospel, and get your souls filled with a sense of redeeming love, and every storm you encounter shall only forward you to your desired haven, and every furnace you endure shall only purge you from your dross, and "fit you, as vessels of honour, for the use of your Divine Master^g." Of those who come to heaven, as all, more or less, must be content to do, through much tribulation, not one ever did, or ever shall, complain, that his trials have been too great. Our passage to heaven may be laborious: but our rest shall amply compensate for all our labours.]

^a Heb. ii. 17, 18.

^b Ps. xl. 2, 3.

^c Mic. vii. 8.

^d Heb. iv. 15, 16.

^e Ps. cxii. 4.

^f 2 Tim. ii. 21.

CCCCLXIV.

DEATH.

Job xiv. 10. *Man giveth up the ghost, and where is he^a?*

AFFLICTIONS, whilst they wean us from the love of this present world, serve to familiarize us with the thoughts of death, and to make that which to our nature is terrible, an object of desire and hope^b. But it is proper for us to contemplate this subject whilst we are yet in a state of health and prosperity; and, especially, to make the removal of others to the eternal world an occasion of considering what our own state may shortly be.

Man consists of soul and body. These, in death, are separated; the body returning to its native dust, and "the soul returning to God who gave it." This separation must speedily take place, whatever be our rank, our age, our employment. The very instant that "our soul is required of us," it must be surrendered up; nor can the skill of all the physicians in the universe enable us to ward off the stroke of death one single hour.

And when the hour arrives for "man to give up the ghost, Where is he?" Whilst he is yet alive, we may find him. His office in life will assist us in our inquiry. The student, the mechanic, the man of pleasure, yea, and even the traveller, may be sought for, each in his own vocation, and may be found without great difficulty: but who shall find the man, when once his spirit has taken its flight to the invisible world? No more shall he return to his former abode; no more have intercourse with his former friends. The house he has built, or the books he has written, may remain: but he himself shall be far away, and the place he has inhabited shall know him no more. A tree that is cut down may sprout again: but not

^a This is inserted, not as a set Discourse, but merely as a specimen of an easy, popular, and extemporaneous Address on occasion of a Funeral.

^b See Job vii. 1—10. and ver. 1, 2. of the chapter before us.

so the man that dies : he shall pass away as a morning cloud, and be no more seen^c.

Then where is he,

I. As to any opportunity of serving God ?

[Once, he had one talent at least committed to him, and he might have improved it for God : but now it is taken from him : whatever he once possessed of corporeal or mental power, of time, of wealth, of influence, is all gone for ever ; and he can do no more for God than if he had never existed in the world — — —]

II. As to any means of benefiting his own soul ?

[Time was, when he could read the blessed book of God, and draw nigh to a throne of grace, and pour out his soul in prayer, and lay hold on the promises of the Gospel, and seek from the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, such communications of grace and mercy and peace as were needful for him : but this time is passed away : no access to God now ; no help from the Saviour now ; no scope for repentance now : none of these things remain to a soul that is once removed to the eternal world^d : the work that is unfinished now will remain unfinished for ever — — —]

III. As to any hope of carrying into effect his purposes and resolutions ?

[There are few so hardened, but they have some thought or purpose of turning unto God before they die. To the gay, the laborious, the dissolute, the fit time for religious services is not yet arrived : but all have a secret conviction, that the concerns of the soul deserve some attention ; and they hope that, in a dying-hour at least, they shall regard what, in despite of all their levity, they know to be the one thing needful. Peradventure the young only waited till they were settled in life ; or till their children should be grown up, and leave them more at leisure to follow the dictates of their better judgment : and those who were immersed in earthly cares only waited till they should be able to retire from the world, and to devote a good measure of their attention to heavenly things. But “ the day is closed upon them ; and the night is come, in which no man can work : ” “ their soul being, as it were, prematurely and unexpectedly required of them,” their hopes are never realized, their desires never are accomplished — — —]

IV. As to any possibility of preparing for his eternal state ?

^c Eccl. ix. 10.

^d ver. 7—12.

[The fight is terminated; the race is closed; the crown awarded. There is no return to the field of action; no further scope for amended efforts: "As the tree falls, so it lies;" and so it will lie to all eternity. Pardon, peace, holiness, glory, are all at an unapproachable distance to him who dies without having attained the possession of them. There is an impassable gulf between him and heaven; and he must take his portion for ever in that place for which alone he is prepared — — —]

Permit me, then, now to ASK,

1. If the time were come for us to "give up the ghost," where should we be?

[This is a thought which ought frequently and deeply to occupy all our minds. Of *individual persons* we can know but little: but respecting *characters* we may form a very correct judgment. For instance, we know where the man who dies *impenitent* shall be^a; and where the man who has not fled to Christ for refuge^b; and where also the hypocritical professor^c. And if we will candidly search out our own character, we may form a very accurate estimate respecting our future destination. I beg you, then, to examine carefully into the state of your own souls, in reference to your penitence — — — your faith — — — your obedience to God's commands — — — and then to say, as before God, what expectations the result of that inquiry will authorize? Reflect, too, I pray you, on the inconceivable difference of those two states, to one of which you must go; and on *the different emphasis with which the reflection in my text will be uttered by your surviving friends*, according as their hopes or apprehensions respecting you are formed — — —]

2. As the time for your giving up the ghost will shortly come, "Where should you *now* be?"

[Are the scenes of gaiety and dissipation those which you should chiefly affect? Should not rather the house of God be the place where you should delight to resort? and should not your own closet be frequented by you for the purposes of reading, and meditation, and prayer? — — — In a word, should you not live as dying men, and improve your time in preparation for eternity? — — — Realize the thought of your feelings in that day, when, in the eternal world, you shall say, "*Where am I?*" O! the blessedness of that reflection, if you died in a state of acceptance with God; and the anguish it will occasion, if you died under his displeasure! I pray you,

^a Luke xiii. 3. 5. ^b John iii. 18, 36. ^c Matt. vii. 21—23.

Brethren, waste no more time in vanity and folly, but attend now to the great concerns of your souls; that, if the inquiry be made either here or in the invisible world, "Where is he?" the answer may be, "He is happy for ever, in the bosom of his God."]

CCCCLXV.

THE CHANGE THAT TAKES PLACE AT DEATH.

Job xiv. 14. *All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.*

"IS there not an appointed time to man upon earth^a?" Yes, there is: the time for every man's entrance into the world, and the time for his continuance in it, are fixed by Almighty God, from whose hand we come, and by whose hand alone we are upheld. Successive generations arise, and are swept away, like the foliage, which by revolving seasons is produced and destroyed. But in *this* the illustration fails: "for there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground, yet, through the scent of water, it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant: but man dieth, and wasteth away; yea, "man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" "As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up; so man lieth down, and riseth not, till the heavens be no more^b." The change at death is complete: and, therefore, whether a man be elated with joys or depressed with sorrows, it becomes him to look forward to that period, when all present things shall have passed away, and an eternity, an unalterable eternity, shall commence. In the prospect of this period, Job consoled himself under his accumulated sorrows; and determined to wait with patience all the days of his appointed time, till this change should come.

It will be profitable to consider,

^a Job vii. 1.

^b ver. 7—12.

I. What is that change that awaits us all—

The voice of inspiration tells us, “It is appointed unto men once to die; and after that the judgment.” Now, the change that takes place in death is,

1. Great—

[That which passes upon the body we can in some measure appreciate; because we see before our eyes the frame, which but lately exhibited the loveliest evidences of creative wisdom, despoiled of all its powers, and reduced to the lowest state of degradation and deformity.

But who can estimate the change which death produces on the soul? Who can form any adequate idea of its views and feelings in a disembodied state? Respecting it we know little more than that it exists: of the mode of its existence, or the nature of its operations, or the extent of its powers, we have no means of judging. That it is in a state of inconceivable happiness or misery, indeed, we have no doubt: but all beyond that is mere conjecture. This, however, sufficiently warrants us to affirm, that the change which takes place in death is *great*. It is also,]

2. Momentous—

[It is a transition, not only from the use of means to the absence of all means, but from a state of probation to a state of retribution. Here we can read the word of God, and hear it from God’s appointed ministers. Here we can draw nigh to God in prayer, and implore mercy at his hands, and plead his great and precious promises, and flee for refuge to the hope that is set before us. In our present state there is “a cloud of witnesses,” surveying all our motions, and, with affectionate solicitude, panting for our success^c. God himself is watching over us, and saying, “How shall I give thee up^d?” “Wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be^e?” But the very instant that the soul departs from the body, its state is fixed; all opportunities of promoting its welfare are terminated^f; and a sentence of happiness or misery is awarded to it, according to what it has done in the body during the period of its existence here.

The awfulness of this change is yet further increased by the consideration of its being,]

3. Permanent—

[True it is, indeed, that the body shall undergo a further change; because it will be raised again, to participate the lot

^c Heb. xii. 1.

^e Jer. xiii. 27.

^d Hos. xi. 8.

^f Eccl. ix. 10.

which had been previously assigned to the soul. But, from the instant of its dissolution, its doom was fixed; and to all eternity will it remain an heir of happiness or woe. Conceive now the soul and body exalted to the throne of God, to enjoy all his blessedness and glory; or cast down to hell, to endure all the terrors of his wrath! Conceive its state irreversibly and unalterably fixed, so that, when millions of ages shall have rolled on, it shall be no nearer a termination than at its commencement! In what a view does this exhibit the change that shall take place at death! Truly, this is a subject which deserves the deepest consideration, and which, above all others, ought to operate with the greatest force upon our minds.]

Let us consider,

II. Our duty in reference to it—

We should continually look forward to that change, and “wait” for it in a state,

1. Of patient expectation—

[When trouble comes upon us, we are apt to feel impatience, and are ready, like Elijah, to pray that “God would take away our life.” Many, alas! proceed even to the extremity of terminating their lives by suicide: and I cannot but think that the act of suicide would be still more common, if the dread of an hereafter did not operate to produce a submission to present ills, as, upon the whole, a preferable alternative. But we should bear in mind, that “the number of our days is determined” of the Lord; that they are continually drawing to a close; that, in a little time, our afflictions, how great soever they may at present be, will come to a close; and, consequently, like persons waiting for the morning, we should submit with patience to the evils of the night.]

2. Of diligent preparation—

[The present is the only time for securing happiness in the eternal world. Now, therefore, every hour should be improved for that end. Whatever talents have been committed to us, we should employ them so as to give a good account of them at last. If we have but one talent, we should not hide it in a napkin, but turn it to the best account that we are able; that so our Divine Master may, at his coming, receive his own with usury.]

Let this subject TEACH us,

1. The folly of ambition—

[What if we possessed all that the world could give? We might speedily, like Job, be dispossessed of all, or be

rendered incapable of enjoying it. At all events, the instant our "change" comes, we must resign it all, and go naked out of the world, even as naked as we came into it. Who, that reflects on this, does not see that vanity is inscribed on all created good?]

2. The wisdom of true piety—

[Piety is that which alone will profit us in the eternal world: and the effects of that remain unchangeable for evermore. Know, then, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do thereafter: the praise of it endureth for ever."]

CCCCLXVI.

THE FOLLY OF TRUSTING IN VANITY.

Job xv. 31. *Let not him that is deceived trust in vanity: for vanity shall be his recompence.*

THE friends of Job were enlightened and pious men; but they altogether mistook the character of Job, and misinterpreted the dispensations of God towards him. They had assumed a principle which they carried too far: they laid it down as an invariable rule, that hypocrites would be visited with some peculiar judgments, and that extraordinary afflictions were in themselves a proof of some extraordinary wickedness which had procured them. But though they were mistaken in this, their observations are frequently most weighty and important. The words in our text are a kind of general truth, founded upon what Eliphaz had spoken in reference to Job. As applied to Job, it was not by any means pertinent: but as an abstract truth, it is deserving of our deepest attention. Let us consider,

I. The caution—

Men are universally "deceived" through the influence of a corrupt heart, a tempting world, and a subtle adversary. And that deception shews itself, as in other things, so particularly in the "trust" which they place in "lying vanities." They trust,

1. In vain conceits—

[Men conceive themselves to be possessed of wisdom, goodness, strength, in such a degree at least as to warrant their expectation of happiness in a future world. Tell them from God, that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and they will deny your positions as false, and ridicule them as enthusiastic. They have no idea that they need the influences of the Holy Ghost to enlighten their minds, or the blood of Christ to atone for their sins, or the grace of Christ to renovate their hearts.]

But let them examine their boasted attainments, and see whether they amount to any thing more than “vanity.” Let them see whether their wisdom has made them like-minded with God: let them bring their goodness to the touchstone of God’s law: let them try their strength in any act of spiritual obedience: let them see if they can love God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength: and they must soon be convinced, that they are trusting to a mere vanity.]

2. In vain possessions—

[If a man possess much of this world’s goods he presently trusts in it for happiness^a: “his wealth is his strong city^b,” and he says to gold, “Thou art my confidence^c.”]

But is not wealth also vanity? What can it do to assuage our anguish? or what stability is there in the possession of it? Do not “riches often make themselves wings, and fly away?” Or, when we are saying, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry;” may not God reply, “Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee?”]

Let it not be said, that men do not *trust* in riches; for the reverse is manifest beyond the possibility of contradiction, seeing that the acquisition of wealth is regarded as the chief step towards happiness; and men bestow ten-fold more pains in the attainment of it, than they do in the pursuit of heaven.]

3. In vain hopes—

[Every one hopes that he shall be happy when he dies. But, if we “ask men a reason of the hope that is in them,” they can make no reply that will at all justify their expectations. They will say, that they live as well as others, and that God is too merciful to condemn them: but as for any Scriptural reason, they can assign none.]

What a vanity then is this! If a man were hoping for a harvest while he neglected to use the proper means to obtain one, would not his folly be manifest to all? Wherefore then will

^a 1 Tim. vi. 17.^b Prov. x. 15.^c Job xxxi. 24.

men dream of going to heaven when they die, not only without having one word in all the inspired volume to warrant such a hope, but in direct opposition to the plainest declarations of God concerning them? Is not this a strange infatuation, a fatal delusion?]

4. In vain purposes—

[There is no one so hardened, but he intends at some future period to repent. All who have ever reflected on the value of their souls, or the importance of eternity, must have purposed in their minds that they would prepare to meet their God. But in this state they continue without carrying their purposes into execution. The young confess the necessity of repentance, and declare their intention to seek it: but they arrive at manhood, and repentance is unattained: they proceed to a more advanced period of life, and even to old age, and it still is as far from them as ever. Thus they live, always purposing, but never accomplishing their purpose, till the time for working is for ever past.

Can there be a greater vanity than this? And does not the trusting in such a vanity prove a man deceived?]

That we may not ourselves be guilty of this folly, let us consider,

II. The reason with which the caution is enforced—

God has wisely ordained that men should reap according to what they sow^d. And it will surely be found, sooner or later, that “they who trust in vanity, shall have vanity for their recompence:” they shall reap,

1. Disappointment—

[God alone is the proper object of our trust and confidence, because he alone can support us, and make us happy. If we have looked to sin for happiness, we will venture to ask, with the Apostle, “What fruit have we now of those things whereof we are ashamed?” If we have sought happiness in things lawful, still we must confess, that the creature, however excellent in itself, is but a broken cistern that can hold no water, and that must consequently fail us when we most need its support. We may fitly compare those who expect solid satisfaction in the creature, to a man almost famished, who dreams that he is eating and drinking, but awakes afterwards as empty and unsatisfied as before^e. Truly, “he fills his belly with the east wind^f,” and his fairest prospects shall “be as the

^d Gal. vi. 7. 8. Prov. iv. 8.

^e Isai. xxix. 8.

^f ver. 2.

unripe grape shaken off from the vine, or the blossom cast off from the olive^g."]

2. Vexation—

[Solomon has observed respecting all the choicest things under the sun, that they are "vanity and vexation of spirit:" and the experience of all attests the truth of his observation. The more we trust in the creature, the more pain, generally speaking, it will occasion us: it will not only be a broken staff that refuses to support us, but a sharp "reed that will pierce through the hand that leans upon it^h." When Ahaz relied upon the Assyrian monarch to extricate him from his troubles, he found nothing but additional vexation: "Tiglath-pilneser distressed him, but helped him notⁱ." Thus it will be with all who trust in vanities of any kind, or seek for happiness in any thing but God. They may not yet have reached the crisis of their fate; but vanity and vexation are inseparable, both in this world and in the world to come. They may think that they have a feast to come; but while dreaming of something pleasing to their palate, they will find that they are "feeding on ashes, and a deceived heart hath turned them aside^k."]]

3. Ruin—

[We well know how the tasting of the forbidden fruit, which promised such gratification and benefit to our first parents, terminated, and what misery it brought on them and their posterity: and the same recompence awaits us also, if we trust in lying vanities, instead of depending wholly on our God. Hear what God himself says respecting this: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and that maketh flesh his arm, and whose hope departeth from the Lord^l." How should we tremble at such a denunciation as this! O let it have a becoming influence on our minds; and stimulate us to seek our happiness where alone it can be found.]

We conclude with OBSERVING,

1. How necessary is it to mark the state and habit of our minds!

[If it were said that gross sin should issue in misery, we should not be surprised: but we are told that the mere "*trusting* in vanity," independent of any gross sins which may flow from it, "will have vanity for its recompence." Let us look then not to our actions only, but to the state and habit of our minds; since our happiness both in time and in eternity

^g ver. 33. ^h 2 Kings xviii. 21. ⁱ 2 Chron. xxviii. 16, 20.

^k Isai. xlv. 20. See also Eccl. v. 16, 17.

^l Jer. xvii. 5.

depends no less on the latter than on the former. Let us not be satisfied that we are free from any flagrant transgressions, while we are relying on any thing besides God. Let us observe whether we practically feel the emptiness of all created things, and their utter insufficiency to make us happy either here or hereafter. And let us be going forth to God in the constant exercise of prayer, and "commit our souls to him in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator."]

2. How thankful should we be, that there is an all-sufficient Friend in whom we may trust!

[God in Christ is the only legitimate object of our hope and confidence. We are told, under the figure of Eliakim, that "Christ has the key of David; that he openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth; and that on him must hang all the glory of his Father's house^m." "Every vessel in the Lord's house, whether great or small, must hang on him;" and every care must be devolved on him. In him there is a fulness of all that we can want. "In him is wisdom for the blind, righteousness for the guilty, sanctification for the polluted, and redemption for the enslaved: and all this he will become to those who trust in himⁿ." Be thankful then, Brethren, for such a friend, and for the command given you by God, "Trust in him at all times, ye people." Rejoice that he can bear your every burthen, and supply your every want; and that, as a trust in vanity will have vanity for its recompence, so a "confidence in Jesus will have a great, substantial, everlasting recompence of reward^o."]

^m Isai. xxii. 20—24.

ⁿ 1 Cor. i. 30.

^o Heb. x. 35.

CCCCLXVII.

JOB'S CONSCIOUS INTEGRITY.

Job xvi. 19. *Now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.*

GREATLY was this holy man afflicted by his own friends, who came to condole with him; so that he was constrained to say, "Miserable comforters are ye all^a!" Yet was he not wholly destitute of comfort; because he had the testimony of his own conscience, that, to the best of his ability, he had approved himself both to God and man: for neither had there

^a ver. 2.

been any injustice in his hands towards man, nor had his prayer been hypocritical before God^b. Had he been guilty of any secret oppression, he wished the earth to disclose it, and his very prayers also to be rejected of his God^c: but he could appeal to the heart-searching God himself for his integrity: "Now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high."

It shall be my endeavour,

I. To unfold this passage in reference to Job—

These words may be understood as containing,

1. An unquestionable truth—

["The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." There is not an abomination in the heart, which is not seen by God, nor one that is not noticed in the book of his remembrance as a ground of his future judgment. To this the whole Scriptures bear witness: "I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them^d." "I search the heart and try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings^e." On the other hand, there is not a holy motion in the heart, but God notices it in the same manner, and for the same end. "There was *some good thing* in the heart of young Abijah^f;" and God made that the ground of distinguishing him above all his brethren, who were wholly given to iniquity. And where God is said to write in the book of his remembrance the conferences of his people, he is represented as taking peculiar notice of *the thoughts* of those who *listen*, no less than of *the words* of those who *speak*: so observant is he of every the minutest good that can be imagined. The sigh, the groan, the very look, is understood by him, and regarded with delight; and every tear is treasured up in his vials^g, and shall be exhibited by him, in the last day, in attestation of our sincerity. "When thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee^h," is a specimen of the testimony he will bear to our most hidden dispositions and desires.]

2. A consolatory reflection—

[Inexpressibly painful must have been the judgment of his misguided friends. Indeed, appearances were much against him: for why should he be called to endure such complicated

^b ver. 17.

^c ver. 18.

^d Ezek. xi. 5.

^e Jer. xvii. 10.

^f 1 Kings xiv. 13.

^g Ps. lvi. 8.

^h John i. 48.

and unparalleled afflictions, if he did not merit them? and, if he did merit them, what a consummate hypocrite must he have been, to have gained so high a reputation for piety! Such was the interpretation which his friends put upon the troubles that had come upon him. They thought that the dispensations of Providence were a sufficient criterion whereby to estimate a man's character, particularly when they were so extraordinary and unprecedented as those which they now beheld. But Job knew that their accusations were unfounded, and their decision altogether unmerited. The testimony of his conscience, therefore, afforded him no little consolation. He knew that heaven had witnessed in him a far different conduct from that which his uncharitable friends imputed to him, and that God's record concerning him differed widely from theirs: to God, therefore, he committed his case, not doubting but that, when his sentence should be declared, it would be the very reverse of that which they so ignorantly passed upon him. Hence he felt as the Apostle did afterwards, under the imputations cast on him: "It is a small matter to me to be judged of you, or of man's judgment; yea, I judge not mine own self: but he that judgeth me is the Lord¹."]

3. A solemn appeal—

[There are many instances wherein the people of God have made their appeal to him, respecting things of which he only could judge. Thus Samuel^k, and David^l, and Paul^m, frequently called God to witness, either their innocence of evils imputed to them, or their performance of things to which he alone was privy. And it is in this sense, chiefly, that the words of my text are to be understood. In this view they have the nature of an oath, and should have put an end to all further controversy on the subject. In another place he makes a similar appeal to God, and says, "Thou knowest I am not wicked," that is, wilfully and deliberately wickedⁿ. And happy was he, in having such a witness as could not err, and such a record as could never be set aside.]

Such being, as I conceive, the import of this passage, I shall now,

II. Improve it in reference to ourselves—

To every description of person is this passage capable of most profitable application. And I would, in reference to it, address,

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

^k 1 Sam. xii. 5.

^l Ps. xviii. 23, 24. and xl. 9.

^m Rom. i. 9. 2 Cor. i. 23. Phil. i. 8.

ⁿ Job x. 7.

1. The formal—

[You, because of the constancy of your observances, are ready to persuade yourselves that you are accepted of your God. But what, I would ask, is the witness which you have in heaven, and what the record that is on high concerning you? Can the testimony of the heart-searching God be in your favour? Must it not rather be to this effect? 'I never saw you weeping for your sins: never did I behold you fleeing to Christ with any thing approaching to the earnestness with which a manslayer fled from his pursuer to the city of refuge. Never did I hear you surrendering up yourselves wholly to the Lord, as his redeemed people. As far as outward services have gone, you have been forward enough; but to real vital religion you have been utter strangers.' Consider, Brethren, I pray you, what reply ye will make to such a testimony as this. You cannot set it aside: your own consciences attest the truth of it: yet, if it be true, what hope can ye have before God? Indeed, indeed, ye do but deceive your own souls, whilst ye rest "in a form of godliness, and are destitute of its power."]

2. The hypocritical—

[Well I know, that none will conceive themselves addressed under such a character as this. And I would to God that there were none to whom the character really appertains! But let me ask, Are there none who have embraced the Gospel as a system, and yet never been cast into the mould of it, so as really to be assimilated to their Lord in the spirit and temper of their minds? Can God say concerning all of you, 'I have witnessed the subjugation of your passions, the mortification of your lusts, and the entire change of all your tempers; so that you are no longer proud, and passionate, and vindictive, in your spirit; no longer earthly and sensual in your desires; no longer cold and formal in your duties; but you are become humble, meek, forgiving, towards men; pure, spiritual, and heavenly, in your own souls; and devout and holy before God?' What say you? Can the heart-searching God bear this testimony respecting you? and is this the habit which every hour bears to heaven, to be recorded there? Tell me, Brethren, what does conscience say to this? Verily, it must be feared that the experience of many will not bear this test; but that their own consciences at this moment condemn them as guilty of gross, and flagrant, and frequent inconsistencies: and, "if your own hearts condemn you, remember that God is greater than your hearts, and knoweth all things." It is to little purpose that your external conduct be approved: for "God looketh at the heart;" and expects that you "be renewed in

the spirit of your mind." He will bring all your tempers and dispositions under examination at the last day: and, if he cannot bear witness to the loveliness of them here, you may be assured that you can have no favourable testimony from him hereafter. You may forget your motions of pride and envy, of uncharitableness and discontent, of covetousness and impurity, but God records them all in the book of his remembrance, and will surely bring them forth, to the confusion and condemnation of your souls, if you do not get them washed away in the Redeemer's blood, and mortified through the influences of his Holy Spirit. I pray you, remember, it is by your fruits that the tree will be estimated; and, according as they shall be found, will you either be translated to heaven, or cast into the lake of fire, to be the fuel of God's righteous indignation through all eternity.]

3. The calumniated—

[It is possible that some of you, like Job, may lie under censures which you do not deserve, and may "have things laid to your charge which you never knew." It is possible, too, that appearances may be against you; as was the case with Joseph in Potiphar's palace; and with Benjamin, when Joseph's cup was found upon him. Should this be your unfortunate condition, commit, with all humility, your cause to God, and leave yourselves altogether in his hands. Doubtless it is extremely painful to be calumniated and traduced: but the testimony of a good conscience is sufficient to support you, especially when confirmed by the witness of God's Spirit in your souls. You remember "how many charges were brought against our blessed Lord: yet he answered to never a word, insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly." Imitate ye Him in this respect. Be not too eager about the vindication of yourselves: but let your life speak, and your spirit speak: and the time shall speedily arrive, if not in this world, yet certainly in the life to come, when your character shall be cleared, and your righteousness shine forth as the noon-day sun.]

4. The sincere—

[It is an unspeakable consolation to know that God is acquainted with all that passes in our hearts. If he knows our defects, he knows also our humiliation on account of them. He knows what conflicts we sustain, and what victories we gain through the mighty operation of his Spirit on our souls. And if we be "Israelites indeed without guile," he will bear witness to it before the whole assembled universe, and vouchsafe to us the richest tokens of his mercy and love. Be watchful, then, against every deviation from duty, even in thought; and

labour incessantly to "keep a conscience void of offence, towards both God and man." Bear in mind, that the eye of God is ever upon you; and endeavour constantly to walk as in his immediate presence. Thus will you approve yourselves to him, and ensure from him in judgment that testimony of his approbation, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things; be thou ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."]

CCCCLXVIII.

DARK DISPENSATIONS OVERRULED FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SAINTS.

Job xvii. 9. *The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.*

AMONGST all the doctrines of our holy religion, there is not one more difficult to be received than that which here offers itself to our notice: it may well be numbered amongst "the deep things of God." The manner too in which it has been professed by men of enthusiastic minds, or antinomian habits, has rendered it odious in the eyes of thousands, who yet are truly upright before God. But neither the difficulty of guarding it from abuse, nor the averseness of men to embrace it, must deter us from stating what we believe to be the truth of God. We would not needlessly go out of our way to introduce a subject of such difficult discussion; nor, on the other hand, should we feel justified in passing it by when it comes fairly before us: we are bound "to declare unto you," as far as we are able, "*the whole* counsel of God." The doctrine we allude to is that which is generally called, The perseverance of the saints: and it is evidently contained in the words of our text. Job, seeing how all his friends were puzzled and confounded by the mysterious dispensation under which he was suffering, consoled himself with the thought, that, when the issue of it should be seen, it should greatly promote the edification of all who were truly upright: persons who were unsound or hypocritical might be discouraged by it; but "the upright and

innocent" would rescue it from abuse; and would take occasion from it to pursue their course with augmented steadiness and zeal.

Agreeably to this view of our text, we will proceed to state,

I. The general principles upon which the perseverance of the saints is founded—

It is supposed by many, that there is in the souls of the regenerate a principle which is in its own nature imperishable and indestructible: and in support of this opinion, they appeal to several passages of Scripture which seem to establish this fact. They say, that "we are born of incorruptible seed^a;" that, "because this seed remaineth in us, we cannot sin^b;" and that it must of necessity "spring up unto everlasting life^c." But we are by no means satisfied with this statement: we doubt much whether there be in the universe a man, provided he possess one grain of humility, who will venture to affirm, that he has such an *indestructible* principle of grace within him: nor do we think that the passages here cited do by any means establish such a notion: the seed to which such efficacy is ascribed, is, not a *principle*, but "*the word of God^d*:" and it is *the tendency*, rather than *the certain infallible effect*, of the Spirit's operations, that our Lord speaks of, when he compares his Spirit to "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Nevertheless we think that there is in the Holy Scripture sufficient foundation for the doctrine we are considering. It may be proved,

1. From the immutability of God—

[It is "from God that every good and perfect gift proceeds^e;" even from Him "with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning^f" — — — These gifts are the result of his own eternal purpose and grace^g: and they are bestowed by him

^a 1 Pet. i. 23.

^b 1 John iii. 9.

^c John iv. 14.

^d If we compare 1 Pet. i. 23. with the latter part of 1 John ii. 14. they will give the true explanation of that difficult passage, 1 John ii. 9. They will shew, that *the seed* is not a *principle*, but *the word*.

^e Phil. ii. 13.

^f Jam. i. 17.

^g 2 Tim. i. 9.

with a fixed purpose to render them effectual for the salvation of our souls^h. Hence they are said to be “without repentanceⁱ,” or change of mind in him who bestows them. There is an inseparable connexion between the original purpose formed in the divine mind, and the final completion of it in the salvation of the person thus chosen^k: and to this very immutability in the divine mind is the salvation of men expressly ascribed^l. “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his^m.”]

2. From the covenant of grace—

[In the covenant which God from all eternity entered into with his dear Sonⁿ, there were a number given to Christ, to be his purchased possession^o. In behalf of these the Saviour stipulated, not only to redeem them by his blood, but also to keep them by his grace^p: and the Father also engaged, not only never to depart from them, but to secure them from ever finally departing from him^q. Provision was made for them, that they should have “every thing that pertained to life and godliness:” and the promises which assured these things to them, were made irrevocable^r; that so their consolation might be made abundant^s, and their salvation sure^t. On this covenant the Christian lays hold^u; and in an assured dependence on it he may say, “I am confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in me will perform it until the day of Christ^v,” and that nothing shall ever “separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord^w.” In this covenant David felt his security^x; and in this may every believer trust, with humble, but unshaken, confidence^y.]

3. From the intercession of Christ—

[Whence was it that, when Peter and Judas resembled each other so much in their crimes, they differed so widely in their end; the one being restored to his apostleship, and the other being left to go to his own place? Our Lord himself tells us: “Peter, I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not^b.” And to the same cause must be traced the restoration of all who are restored, and the stability of all who stand. St. Paul, in defying all his enemies, lays the chief stress on this: he mentions with gratitude a *dying* Saviour; but glories more especially in the thought of Christ as *risen*, and as *making*

^h 2 Thess. ii. 13.

ⁱ Mal. iii. 9.

^o John xvii. 6.

^p 2 Cor. i. 20.

^q Isai. lvi. 4, 6.

^r 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

^s Luke xxii. 32.

^t Rom. xi. 29.

^u 2 Tim. ii. 19.

^v John xvii. 12.

^w Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^x Phil. i. 6.

^y 2 Tim. i. 12. and iv. 8 18.

^k Rom. viii. 29, 30.

^l Tit. i. 2.

^m Jer. xxxii. 40.

ⁿ Rom. iv. 16.

^o Rom. viii. 35—39.

continual intercession for the saints^c. *Him* the Father heareth always: and, whilst *he* "appeareth in the presence of God for us," "bearing our names on his breastplate," and "making intercession for us according to the will of God," we need not fear but that we shall in due time occupy "the mansions which he has prepared for us."]

On these grounds we believe that the saints' perseverance in faith and holiness is secured.

II. The particular manner in which the most untoward circumstances shall be overruled to promote it—

This is the particular point to which our attention should be directed, in order to elucidate the true import of the text: for, in the text we have an assurance, not merely that the saints shall persevere, but that they shall persevere under circumstances which will prove a stumbling-block unto all whose hearts are not truly upright before God.

There are many circumstances which prove stumbling-blocks to the unsound—

[Amongst these we must first notice those which Job himself more especially refers to. Though he was perfect and upright in himself, he was oppressed with a heavier load of afflictions than ever fell to the lot of mortal man; and in the midst of them, appeared to be forsaken of his God. Now from such a dispensation, a man whose heart was not right with God would be ready to conclude, that it was in vain to serve God; and that, if he is to be subjected to such trials as these, it were better at once to seek the happiness which the world affords; since God puts no difference between the righteous and the wicked.

But more especially, if there be heavy trials for righteousness' sake, the unsound professor is alarmed; and he draws back from an open confession of Christ, lest he should be involved in troubles which he is not willing to endure^d.

But the greatest obstacle in the way of the unsound arises from the falls of those who make a profession of religion. A man whose principles are not fixed, is ready to doubt whether there be any truth in the Gospel itself, when he sees a Judas and a Demas making shipwreck of their faith. Our blessed Lord told us, not only that such circumstances would arise,

^c Rom. viii. 34. with Rom. v. 10. and Heb. vii. 25.

^d John x. 22.

but that they would produce the most unhappy effects: "Woe unto the world because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come."]

But all these tend ultimately to the establishment of those who are truly upright—

[The assurance that trouble springs not out of the dust, composes their minds under the diversified trials of life: they know, that, whoever be the instrument, it is God who uses it; and that He doeth all things well.

If persecution rage, he has counted the cost, and is "ready to suffer the loss of all things" for Christ's sake; yea, "he rejoices, if he is counted worthy to suffer for his Redeemer's sake." The imprisonment of Paul was designed to intimidate his followers, and to obstruct the progress of the Gospel: but "it turned out rather to the furtherance of the Gospel," inasmuch as multitudes were encouraged by his example to preach the truth with greater firmness and zeal*.

So also, if there be any public disgrace brought on the Gospel by the misconduct of those who have been regarded as eminent in the Church, the truly upright Christian is not at all shaken in his faith: he knows that the Gospel is wholly independent of those who profess it: if eleven of the Apostles had proved like Judas, he would not therefore have concluded that there was either less importance, or less efficacy, in the Gospel of Christ. He considers religion as standing on its own proper grounds; and he determines, through grace, to adhere to Christ, though all others should forsake him.

Here it may be well to mark more distinctly the operation of such circumstances on the true believer's mind.

Events like these *humble him before God*: they shew him how weak he himself is, and how certainly he also shall fall and perish, if for one moment he be forsaken of his God. They *make him also more earnest in prayer to God*. Seeing whence alone his strength must come, he cries day and night, "Hold thou up my goings in thy ways, that my footsteps slip not." Moreover, he takes occasion from them to *search and try more carefully his own heart*, lest he also should have deceived his own soul. He *is put also on his guard against temptations*, and *is made to watch more carefully against every occasion of sin*. Finally, he *is made to feel the necessity of living more simply and entirely by faith* in the Son of God, and of receiving out of his fulness those supplies of grace and strength, whereby alone he can hope to get the victory.

Thus are those very events, which weaken the hands, discourage the hearts, and subvert the faith of hypocrites, overruled

* Phil. i. 12—14.

for the advancement and establishment of the righteous in every good word and work.]

To GUARD against an abuse of this doctrine, we entreat you to bear in mind,

1. The characters who alone can take comfort in it—

[It is “the righteous” only, and he that “hath clean hands,” that has any title to the promise before us, or that is in a fit state to derive any consolation from it. If any be walking in the habitual indulgence of either open or secret sin, he is a hypocrite before God; and to be left to “hold on *his way*,” will be the heaviest curse that can be inflicted on him. Know, all of you, that “herein the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; he that doeth not righteousness is not of God^f.”]

2. The way in which alone it should be improved—

[It is not to create in any one an unhallowed confidence, and to make him imagine that he may relax his exertions; but rather to encourage his exertions, from the assurance that they shall not be in vain^g. Whatever confidence we may feel, it must always be blended with holy fear^h. If the Apostle “kept under his body, lest after having preached to others he himself should become a castaway,” who amongst us will feel himself at liberty to remit his caution, or relax his diligence, in the ways of God? “The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day:” and whilst we have an evidence that our path accords with that description, we shall be in no danger of deceiving ourselves: but the very moment that our progress is doubtful, we have reason to inquire whether we are indeed upright before God. Use then this doctrine, not as an excuse for idleness, but as an incentive to diligence; that you may “not lose the things which you have wrought, but may receive a full reward.”]

^f 1 John iii. 10.

^g 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^h Prov. xxviii. 14.

CCCCCLXIX.

CHRIST A LIVING REDEEMER.

Job xix. 25—27. *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall*

I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another.

THE trials of the saints have not only been eminently conducive to their own good, but also productive of the best effects to the Church at large. It is in afflictive circumstances that their graces have shone most bright; and under them they have made the most glorious confessions, which will be recorded with admiration as long as the world shall stand. Of all the calamities which Job endured, there was none more pungent than the uncharitable censures of his friends, which tended to rob him of his only consolation. But he rose superior to them all; and when he could not convince his friends by argument, he made his appeal to God, and wished it to be written for the vindication of himself, and the encouragement of others to the latest posterity. We shall point out,

I. The substance of his confession—

That Christ is the person spoken of, the very terms here used sufficiently declare.

Job speaks of him as then actually “living”—

[Doubtless Job was no stranger to the promise made to Adam respecting “the seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent’s head;” or to those so often repeated to Abraham, of a “seed, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” The father of the faithful had anticipated the advent of that promised seed, and had rejoiced exceedingly in seeing, though at the distance of two thousand years, the day in which he should exist^a. But Job seems not only to equal, but even to surpass that most distinguished “friend of God;” for he saw Christ as actually living; and understood that, which, when spoken by our Lord, so much confounded the Jewish doctors, “Before Abraham was, I am^b.” Yes, Job beheld him in his pre-existent state, seventeen or eighteen hundred years before he became incarnate; he beheld him as having life in himself, and as being the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever^c.]

He even declares him to be “God”—

[The same person whom he calls “his Redeemer,” he afterwards calls “God.” And in this he is supported by

^a John viii. 56. ^b John viii. 58. ^c John i. 4. Heb. xiii 8.

numberless other testimonies of Holy Writ. The evangelical prophet tells us that the very same person who was "a child born, and a son given, was also the Mighty God^d;" and the New Testament assures us that He was "Emmanuel, God with us, even God manifest in the flesh^e." Job was accused of ignorance by his friends; but it is to be feared that they had not by any means such exalted views of Christ as he here exhibits.]

This holy man yet further confesses Christ as "his Redeemer"—

[The word *Goel* imports the nearest of kin, in whom the right of redeeming any estate that had been sold was vested^f. Behold then the depths of divine truths which had been revealed to Job! He sees his God incarnate; and himself as "a member of Christ's body, even of his flesh and of his bones^g." He sees Christ redeeming his soul from death and hell; redeeming him at no less a price than his own blood; or, to use the words of an Apostle, he sees "God purchasing the Church with his own blood^h."]]

Nor does he view him only as incarnate, or as dying for the redemption of man, but as coming again to judge the world—

[The words used by Job might be applied to the incarnation and resurrection of Christ; but they seem rather to designate his appearance in the last day to judge the world. This office is "committed to Christ because he is the Son of man;" and when he shall execute it, "he will come from heaven in like manner as he ascended up to heaven:" He will not indeed any longer be seen in a state of weakness and humiliation, but "in all the glory of his Father and his holy angels:" nevertheless He will then appear "as a lamb that has been slain;" and will summon all those who pierced him to his tribunal.]

But that which gives inexpressible dignity to this confession, is, the full assurance it expresses of *his* rising from the grave in that day to behold and enjoy Christ—

[He does not seem to have had any hope of restoration to temporal prosperity; but speaks in the most confident manner of his resurrection to eternal happiness. The destruction of his mortal frame by worms was not in his eyes any bar to its

^d Isai. ix. 6. ^e Matt. i. 23. 1 Tim. iii. 16. ^f Lev. xxv. 25.

^g Heb. ii. 11, 14, 15. Eph. v. 30.

^h Acts xx. 28.

renovation in the last day. He knew that what was sown in corruption, weakness, and dishonour, should be raised in incorruption, power, and glory; that his vile body should be changed like unto Christ's glorious body¹; and that when his earthly tabernacle should be dissolved, he had an house, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens². He knew that, having awaked up after his Redeemer's likeness, he should behold him, not as now through a glass darkly, but face to face, and dwell for ever in his presence where is fulness of joy³. This re-union of his soul and body, together with the beatific vision of his glorified Redeemer, was the one object of his most earnest desires, and most assured hopes. And he was determined, notwithstanding all the accusations of his friends, to maintain "this rejoicing of his hope firm unto the end."

We shall endeavour to IMPROVE this subject by considering,

II. The lessons to be learned from it—

Whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our learning: and this confession in particular suggests to us that,

1. A full assurance of hope is attainable in this world—

[Job's assurance seems to have been remarkably strong: he not only calls Jesus *his* Redeemer, but proclaims his confident expectation of dwelling with him for ever: he speaks of this, not as a thing which he surmised, or hoped, but as what he "knew" for certain. Nor was this a privilege peculiar to Job. Had not Paul also the same delightful confidence, when he said, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day^m;" and again, when he professed that "henceforth there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge should give himⁿ?" And has not the same Apostle bidden us all to shew the same diligence to *the full assurance of hope unto the end*^o? Why then should we rest satisfied without attaining this blessed hope? Would it not serve as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast^p, amidst all the storms and billows of this tempestuous world? Would it not be an effectual antidote to the poisonous breath of calumny, which will ever

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 42, 43. Phil. iii. 21.

² 2 Cor. v. 1.

³ 1 Cor. xiii. 12. 1 John iii. 2. Ps. xvi. 11. and xvii. 15.

^m 2 Tim. i. 12.

ⁿ 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^o Heb. vi. 11.

^p Heb. vi. 19.

strive to blast the fairest characters? Will not the testimony of a good conscience fill us with joy even when we are loaded with the bitterest accusations^q? Shall we not say with St. Paul, "It is a small matter with me to be judged of you or of man's judgment, yea, I judge not mine own self, but he that judgeth me is the Lord?" Seek then to "know your election of God;" strive to make it sure and evident to yourselves^r; and be continually "living a life of faith on the Son of God," that you may be able to say, "He has loved me, and given himself for me^t."]

2. A clear knowledge of Christ in his person and offices is the best groundwork of an assured hope—

[Though Job had been too ready to boast of his integrity, it was not on *that* that he founded his hopes of immortality and glory. He knew himself to be under the curse of God's broken law; and that Christ, as his Redeemer, was his "deliverer from that curse, having himself been made a curse for him." And what other foundations of hope can *we* have? Are we holier than Job, who notwithstanding all his holiness exclaimed, "Behold, I am vile?" Have we not at least as much reason as he to "abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes?" How then shall *we* pretend to be just before God? Let this be firmly settled in our minds, that we must flee to Christ for redemption, before we can know him to be our Redeemer: we must be united to him by faith, before we can claim him as our nearest kinsman: we must behold his glory now as it is exhibited in the glass of the Gospel, if we would behold it with joy in the great day of his appearing. Let us then seek to know Christ as he is revealed in the word: let us "search the Scriptures, which testify of him," and pray for the illuminating influences of that Spirit, whose office is, to "glorify Christ, by taking of the things that are his, and shewing them unto us." Let us be ashamed that Job, who lived before there was any written record of Christ in the world, should know more of Christ than we, who live in the meridian splendour of gospel light. And, whatever we have attained, let us seek daily to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."]

3. There is no state, however afflictive, wherein an assurance founded on the knowledge of Christ will not support and comfort us—

[It is worthy of observation, that from the instant Job uttered these words he was enabled to suppress, in a considerable

^q 2 Cor. i. 12.

^r 1 Cor. iv. 3.

^s 1 Thess. i. 4.

^t Gal. ii. 20.

^u Job xlii. 6.

measure, his bitter murmurings and complaints. And what greater support can any man need than to know that he has Christ for his redeeming God, and that after a few more conflicts he shall enjoy him for ever^{*}? We do not indeed expect that a person shall always be so elevated by these considerations, as to soar above all sense of his afflictions. But sometimes even this may be enjoyed; and at all times we may hope to “possess our souls in patience, till patience have its perfect work, and we be perfect and entire, lacking nothing.” Let the sons and daughters of affliction then have recourse to this remedy: let them labour to attain a thankful sense that they have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son; and then they need not fear but that they shall be strengthened unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness[†]. Let them seek an evidence that they are Christ’s: let them beg the Holy Spirit to witness to their spirit that they are children of God; and then their trials, however grievous at the time, shall only serve as a boisterous wind, to waft them more speedily to their desired harbour.]

^{*} 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.

[†] Col. i. 11, 12.

CCCCLXX.

AGAINST HYPOCRISY.

Job xx. 4—7. *Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?*

PREJUDICE or passion will miserably warp the judgment. It will hide from us what we might know, and cause us to pervert what we do know. Never was this more strongly exemplified than in the friends of Job. Had they calmly considered, they might have comforted him in his affliction; but, by a hasty misapplication of acknowledged truths, they most unjustly and cruelly condemned him. Job had hinted to them the evil and danger of their conduct^{*}. And Zophar, irritated at the caution, replies with great severity. His words, however, though mis-

^{*} Job xix. 28, 29.

applied, suggest to us two very important truths respecting sinners :

I. Their prosperity is transient—

Of sinners, some *make no profession* of religion, and others *a false profession*. Each of these characters may enjoy, for a while, great prosperity—

[The *profane* are often exalted to places of dignity and power: they prosper in all their labours for wealth and preferment. They not only despise, but perhaps persecute the godly: they “triumph,” as though no evil should ever happen unto them. This the Psalmist saw with deep regret^b.

Hypocrites also frequently are held in estimation^c. They are objects of envy to many an humble and contrite soul. They will boast of experiences which might well be coveted; and even attain considerable heights of joy^d. Their “excellency may mount up to the heavens, and their heads reach unto the clouds.”]

But their prosperity will be of short duration—

[Death will speedily seize upon the most stout-hearted sinner. Then all, which he gloried in, shall come to an end. None of his “pomp shall follow him,” or his “wealth be carried with him.” The hypocrite also shall have a period put to his dissimulation: he shall soon appear in his proper character. The all-seeing God will discover the secrets of his heart. Nor is this time at any great distance^e: in comparison of eternity, the duration of his joy will be “but a moment.”]

Then will they experience a sad reverse—

II. Their ruin will be tremendous—

The ungodly will in due time be visited for their offences. They will then “perish;”

1. To their own eternal shame—

[Many portions of Scripture appear to us indelicate; but God's representations of sin are surely just, and well calculated to make us nauseate and lothe it. Such is his description of the *ways* of sinners^f; and such his declaration respecting their *end*^g. They will perish under circumstances of disgrace and ignominy. Christ will not deign to own them before his Father^h. The angels will come forth to execute the vengeance

^b Ps. lxxiii. 3—12.

^c Rev. iii. 1.

^d Matt. xiii. 20.

^e Deut. xxxii. 35.

^f 2 Pet. ii. 22.

^g Compare Rev. iii. 16. with the text.

^h Matt. x. 33.

of God upon them. The saints would even "thrust them out of heaven" if they should seek admittance there¹. The damned themselves will insult them with bitter taunts^k: nor shall they ever cease to be objects of contempt and abhorrence. This is told us in the plainest terms^l. Nor, while they retain, as they must, their character, is it possible that their situation ever should be changed^m.]

2. To the astonishment of all that knew them—

[The question, "Where is he?" refers primarily to the utter extinction of the ungodly; but it may well be considered also as an expression of surprise. The *wicked* little think where their course will terminate. If the rich man's request had been grantedⁿ, what reply would his surviving brethren have made so soon as that in the text^o? The *hypocrites* also often escape detection in this world. Perhaps they were celebrated, after their departure, as eminent saints. We may conceive that their dearest friends, or their associates in holy exercises, may inquire after them in heaven. What surprise and horror must seize them, when they hear of the doom which the heart-searching God has passed upon them^p!]

ADDRESS—"KNOW YOU NOT THIS?"

Know you not that this has been so from the beginning of the world?

[Does not the word of God assert, that "it shall be ill with the wicked^q?" Does not the most authentic history in the world prove it to have been so^r? Does not conscience itself testify that it shall be so still?]

¹ Luke xiii. 28.

^k Isai. xiv. 9—16.

^l Prov. xiii. 5. Dan. xii. 2.

^m Rev. xxii. 11.

ⁿ Luke xvi. 23, 27, 28.

^o They would most probably have exclaimed, '*Where is he!* in hell! lifting up his eyes in torments! Is it really so? We never could have thought it: we had no doubt but that he was happy: he seemed to us as worthy and blameless a character as any: nor had he himself any doubts but that he was going to heaven.'

^p If a Minister is to have those as his "joy and crown of rejoicing," who were truly converted by his ministry, we may, not improperly, suppose a degree of disappointment, if he miss those, concerning whom he had entertained the most sanguine hopes. We may suppose him, upon the first discovery, to say, '*Where is he!* What, *he* in hell! I often feared that I myself should go thither; but who would have ever thought that *he* should?' The Lord grant that this may never be realized by any of us!

^q Isai. iii. 11. Ps. ix. 17.

^r Where are now the antediluvian scoffers, the haughty Pharaoh, the treacherous Judas, the worldly-minded Demas, the heretical Hymeneus? &c.

If you know, do you not *consider* this ?

[Can any thing be more worthy of our consideration? If we have "but a moment," should we not improve that moment? Are we willing to perish in this ignominious and awful manner?]

Let us live no longer in the neglect of religion—

[The gratifications of sense can last but for a little time; but the consequences of neglecting God will endure for ever. Surely the care of the soul is the "one thing needful."]

Nor let us rest in a "form of godliness" without experiencing "its power"—

[It will avail us little to deceive our fellow-creatures. The higher we have been in their estimation, the deeper will be our disgrace. Let us then go to Christ for the remission of past sins: let us approve ourselves to him in future, as "servants that need not be ashamed," and labour to be "sincere and without offence until his coming again."]

CCCCLXXI.

THE EMPTINESS OF EARTHLY POSSESSIONS.

Job xx. 22. *In the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits.*

MEN universally, by nature, seek their happiness in earthly things: and though they meet with continual disappointment, they will persevere in the same unprofitable course, "spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not." The question, "Who will shew us any good?" is asked by every man: but it is the godly man alone that answers it aright, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me^a." The godly man attains the object of his pursuit: but the ungodly man finds, by bitter experience, that, whatever be the measure of his success in the attainment of earthly things, "in the fulness of his sufficiency he is in straits."

^a Haman's state, Esther v. 11—13, may here be opened to advantage.

From these words, I will take occasion to shew what a poor wretched creature a mere worldly man is ;

I. As viewed in himself—

It is here supposed, that he may not only possess a very large measure of earthly things, but may have a consciousness that his portion is, as it were, “shaken together, pressed down, and running over.” Yet, “in the fulness of his sufficiency, he will be in straits ;”

1. As it respects his present enjoyments—

[Earthly things, of whatever kind they be, pleasures, riches, or honours, are all, in their nature, empty and unsatisfying — — in their use, transient and cloying — — and, in their effects, productive of trouble and vexation — — — Our blessed Lord has told us, that “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth ;” and Solomon, after trying all things to an extent that no other man ever did, has given us his testimony respecting them, that they are “all vanity and vexation of spirit.”]

2. As it respects his future prospects—

[Every man has a consciousness that there is a future state ; and that earthly possessions, so far from advancing our preparation for it, tend rather to divert our attention from it, and to obstruct our progress in the heavenly life. And it is no uncommon thing for a man, in the midst of all his earthly pleasures, to feel them embittered to him, by a consciousness that he is hastening to the eternal world, and is unprepared for it. In fact, though men may, for a season, shake off the thoughts of eternity, they cannot so divest themselves of it in a time of sickness, and in the approach of death, as not to feel exceedingly straitened in their spirit, and to acknowledge that they have been all their days following a phantom, that has eluded their grasp, and disappointed their expectations.]

But, to see him in his true colours, look at him,

II. As viewed in contrast with a godly man—

As an ungodly man may possess an abundance of earthly comforts, so may a godly man be reduced to great straits. We can scarcely conceive a more destitute condition than that of Lazarus, or that of those persecuted saints who “wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted,

tormented^b." Yet, as the worldling is in straits in the midst of his abundance, so these are in abundance in the midst of all their straits. They enjoy much,

1. In possession—

[They have *peace* with God: and *that* is more to them than ten thousand worlds. With this they have *content*; which reconciles them fully to their state, whatever that state may be. However great their distress may be, they are resigned to it as their Father's will, and they assure themselves that "all things shall work together for their good." They know that "their affliction is but light and momentary, and that it is working out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Hence, so far from being dejected by their trials, they even "glory in them," and find them a source of solid satisfaction^c.]

2. In reversion—

[They are enabled to look up to heaven, with an assurance, that, however destitute *here*, they have in that blessed world "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." They have already a foretaste of that bliss, in "a spirit of adoption," and in the sealing of the Spirit, which is to them "an earnest" of what they are speedily to enjoy in all its fulness. How empty do all earthly things appear to him, whilst in such an elevated state as this! A king upon his throne, if not possessed of these spiritual treasures, is to him an object of pity rather than of admiration and envy: so infinitely is the worldly man below the child of God! The worldly man, in having all things, possesses nothing; but the saint, whilst "having nothing, in reality possesses all things^d."]]

APPLICATION—

1. Seek not happiness in a way of sin—

[Sin may afford a present gratification: but, though it be as honey in the mouth, it will be as gall in the stomach. So we are told in the preceding context^e; and so it is found by every child of man — — —]

2. Be not too intent upon the things of this world—

[In earthly business, of whatever kind, we may be diligent; yea, and great diligence will consist with great fervour of spirit, and spirituality of mind^f. But "our affections are not to be set on things below." In heaven alone is the treasure

^b Heb. xi. 37, 38.

^c ver. 12—14.

^e 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^f Rom. xii. 11.

^d 2 Cor. vi. 10.

which we are to affect; and "where that is, our heart must be also."]

3. Seek your happiness in God alone—

[*There* can be no disappointment, and no satiety. *That* will make you rich in possession, and in reversion too: for if Christ be yours, "all other things must of necessity be yours also: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours: and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's^s."] ^s

^s 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

CCCCLXXII.

CONDUCT OF SINNERS TOWARDS GOD.

Job xxi. 14, 15. *Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?*

AS in the speeches of Job's different friends, so in his answers to them, we must ever bear in mind the ground of their controversy. This, as we have often before mentioned, was, A persuasion on their part that God in his providence would mark the characters of men by his dealings towards them; and that signal judgments of any kind were sufficient, without any other evidence whatever, to prove the pre-eminent wickedness of the person on whom they were inflicted. The different speakers indeed all wander occasionally from the point, and launch out into other topics; but all intended to keep this point in view, and to make it the ultimate object of their discourse. The friends of Job had maintained their side of the question with great confidence, and had driven him more immediately to vindicate himself in opposition to the implied charge contained in their arguments; but here he speaks less of himself, and directs his answer more clearly to the general question. He shews that multitudes of those who prospered in the world were altogether addicted to impiety; yea, that their very prosperity was made by them an occasion

of more determined hostility to God^a: and yet God continued to prosper them both in life and in death, so far, at least, as to exempt them from any remarkable judgments either in the one or the other. The impiety of these persons, as described in our text, must not be interpreted literally, as if the words here used were uttered with their lips: they must be understood as marking rather the language only of their *hearts* and *lives*; and in this view they will be found to designate with equal truth the dispositions and habits of ungodly men in all ages.

In evincing this, we shall,

I. Confirm the assertion in our text—

The assertion itself is most humiliating, seeing that it lays to the charge of unconverted men these two enormous crimes; first, that they cast off all regard for God; and next, that they vindicate this conduct as reasonable and proper. Now that this is but too just a description of unregenerate men, we appeal,

1. To observation—

[What is the conduct of the generality, when the light of divine truth is set before them? Do they not shut their eyes against it? Even the public exhibition of it they do not like: but if a pious minister or friend speak personally to them in secret, they rather resent it as an insult, than accept it with gratitude; and by the aversion to holy things which they manifest, they, in effect, “say to God, Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of thy ways” — — — If an attention to heavenly things be urged from a regard to duty and interest, the generality will deny that a life of godliness is *either necessary or profitable*. They conceive, that their time and talents are altogether their own, to be employed according to their own will and pleasure: and that all serious piety, and a life of communion with God, are sources rather of pain and melancholy than of peace and happiness — — —]

2. To experience—

[What does every man's own heart declare? Let us all look back and see, What has been *our* conduct in relation to this matter? Have we desired the knowledge of *God's* ways, as we have of the ways that lead to worldly honour and interest? Have we not, on the *contrary*, when God, by his

^a “*Therefore.*”

providence, his word, his Spirit, has been knocking at the door of our hearts, said to him, Depart from me; I have other occupations and interests to attend to; Thou must wait for a more convenient season? If pressed by the exhortations of a faithful friend or minister, have we not vindicated ourselves as acting a wise and rational part; and asserted, (by our conduct at least,) that such a devotedness to God as was required of us was neither necessary nor desirable? Yes verily, we all have "hated the light^b," have wished it to be withheld from us^c, have "rebelled against it," when it has flashed conviction on our consciences^d, and have determined to go on our own way, in spite of all God's warnings and invitations^e. By this resistance to God we have in fact denied his authority over us^f, avowed ourselves his decided enemies^g, and lived without him in the world^h — — —]

Let us now proceed,

II. To suggest some reflections naturally arising from it—

1. How marvellous is the patience and long-suffering of God!

[The conduct above described is not peculiar to men of an abandoned character; it is found in every child of man. There are indeed some persons *comparatively* religious. Of these it may be said, that they affect religion, and even glory in the distinction which they assume to themselves as persons fearing God and working righteousness. But, in truth, there are no people more decidedly hostile to the Gospel than those whom we now refer to. No man was ever more zealous for a certain kind of religion than Paul in his unconverted state; yet no man was ever a more bitter persecutor of the Church than he. And it is a fact, that, when the Jews at Antioch wished to expel Paul and Barnabas from their city, they could find no persons that would enter more cordially into their views, or more vigorously execute their designs, than "the devout women, whom they stirred up" to countenance and aid their proceedingsⁱ. "God's ways," whether of *acceptance* with him, or of *obedience* to him, are displeasing and irksome to the natural man; the one being too humiliating for him, and the other too strict and self-denying: and the contempt that is universally poured on those who "walk as Christ walked," is itself the most unequivocal proof of the universality of our

^b John iii. 19, 20. ^c Isai. xxx. 10, 11.

^d Job xxiv. 13.

^e Jer. vi. 16, 17. and xlv. 15—17.

^f Exod. v. 2. Ps. xii. 4. Jer. ii. 31.

^g Rom. viii. 7.

^h Eph. ii. 12.

ⁱ Acts xiii. 50.

departure from God, and our hatred of his ways. How astonishing then is it, that God should bear with us a single hour! that he does not now retaliate upon us, as he will do at the day of judgment, and say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!" Let us then "account the long-suffering of God to be salvation;" and "let his goodness and patience and forbearance lead us to repentance."]

2. What glorious tidings does the Gospel bring to our ears!

[It was for such persons that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, and offered himself a sacrifice to the offended Majesty of heaven: "Whilst we were enemies, Christ died for us." To such persons also are we sent, to offer them a free and full salvation: the extent or long continuance of their rebellion is no bar to the exercise of divine mercy towards them: "Whosoever cometh unto me," says our Lord, "I will in no wise cast him out." O ye who are convinced of your past iniquities, and are sensible of your need of mercy, hear what St. Paul affirms; "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, even the chief." Do not imagine that God is filled with resentment against you, as your earthly parents would have been, if you had so treated them: he is plenteous in mercy; and, if you will go to him, he will "give you his blessing liberally, without upbraiding." If it be thought, that justice will require the execution of vengeance on such sinners as we; be it known, that his justice is satisfied by the atonement which Christ has offered; and that he can now be "just, and yet the justifier of all them that believe."]

3. What a blessed change takes place in the great work of conversion!

[The inmost dispositions of the soul are changed by grace; so that he who lately said unto God, "Depart from me," now desires his presence above all things, and pants after God as the hart after the water-brooks, and considers "his loving-kindness as better than life itself." Now he "counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord." Nor is it the principles only of the Gospel that he loves, but the precepts also; and the way of God's commandments is as much approved as the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. Now he feels that "he is not his own, but, having been bought with a price, is bound to glorify God with his body and his spirit which are God's." Nor is it any longer a question with him, whether there is any profit in communion with God: he knows and feels that there is no employment

under heaven so profitable; and that, in fact, there is no profit in any thing, not even in attending the ordinances or in reading the word of God, unless a blessing be brought down upon the soul by fervent prayer.

Shew ye then, Beloved, the truth of your conversion by the change of your dispositions, your tempers, your habits. If ye be indeed brought forth into marvellous light, "walk as children of the light and of the day." And as some remains of your former corruption will yet be found in you, be daily putting off the old man, and be putting on the new, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.]

CCCCLXXIII.

ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.

Job xxii. 21. *Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace.*

IN estimating the characters and conduct of men, we must make great allowance for their prejudices and mistakes. Unless we take into our consideration the erroneous idea which Job's friends had conceived respecting the dealings of Providence with men, we shall be ready to view them in a most unfavourable light. Even with this allowance we scarcely know how to account for the extreme uncharitableness of Eliphaz. He is not content with accusing Job of secret sins that could be known to God only, but he brings plain and positive charges against him of open visible crimes, no one of which could with even a shadow of truth be imputed to him. We regret to see such inconsistency in a man, whom yet we are constrained to consider as pious: and we turn from this painful view of him, to notice the excellent advice, which, though still under a mistaken apprehension of Job's character, he gave him. To a person under any circumstances, an acquaintance with God is most desirable, but more especially under such a dark and afflictive dispensation as that which Job at this time experienced. That we may invite you all to seek it, we propose to shew,

I. Wherein an acquaintance with God consists—

[There is a knowledge of God which may be obtained from the works of creation: but this must of necessity be extremely partial and defective. They display his wisdom, and power, and goodness; but they exhibit no traces of that perfection which we so greatly need to be acquainted with, namely, his mercy in pardoning sin. It is from revelation only that we can learn his true character as "a just God and a Saviour:" and for a discovery of him in that endearing view, we must look at him as exhibited to us in the Gospel of his Son. It is in the face of Jesus Christ that all his glory shines^a. It is in the cross of Christ that all his perfections are made to unite and harmonize: it is there alone that we can see "mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissing each other." This then it is which constitutes a true knowledge of God; it is an acquaintance with the great work of redemption; a view of "God in Christ Jesus reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" — — —]

II. What is that measure of acquaintance with him which we as sinners are privileged to enjoy—

[It is not a mere speculative knowledge of these things, but an actual participation of them in our own souls: it is not "an hearing of God with our ears, but a seeing of him with our eyes," as Job speaks; I mean, with the eye of faith, which is privileged to "behold Him who is invisible^b." By faith "we have a fellowship," yea a most intimate and endearing fellowship, "with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." God will come and manifest himself to us, as our God, our Father, and our Friend^c. "By his Spirit he will enable us to cry, Abba, Father." "He will dwell in us, and walk with us." Christ will live in us, even as his heavenly Father lived in him; insomuch that "he himself will be our life^d." What nearer intimacy can be conceived? yet this it is our privilege to enjoy: this union with him, this committing of our souls to him, this receiving of all needful communications out of his fulness, this living entirely by faith in him as *our* Saviour and *our* God; this, I say, is that measure of acquaintance with him which we ought to seek, and may actually possess * — — —]

III. The benefits resulting from it—

[Who can ever fully declare what is implied in peace with God? Verily it is "a peace that passeth all understanding" — — — But there is peculiar emphasis in the word "Now;" "acquaint *now* thyself with God, and be at peace."

^a 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^b Heb. xi. 27.

^c Gen. v. 24.

^d John vi. 56, 57. with Col. iii. 4.

^e Gal. ii. 20.

What was the estimate which Eliphaz had formed of Job's character? He viewed Job as the vilest hypocrite upon earth, and considered him as punished by God with most signal vengeance: yet he said to him, "Acquaint *now*," now, notwithstanding all thy vileness; now, in the midst of all these judgments; even *now* acquaint thyself with God; and "so shall good come unto thee." This was indeed a just view of God, though an erroneous view of the poor afflicted saint. This is the view we should ever have of God in Christ Jesus: we should see him ready to bestow his richest mercies even on the chief of sinners, and as determined "never to cast out any who come unto him." Be it known then, that, if only we will acquaint ourselves with God as he is revealed to us in the Gospel of his Son, there is not a good which God himself can bestow, which he will not richly communicate to us; nor is there a condition, either of sin or suffering, in which that acquaintance with him shall not be effectual for the restoration of our souls to peace. Were we the vilest of the human race, our iniquities should be blotted out — — — and were we in a condition a thousand times more deplorable than that of Job, it should turn all our sorrows into joy^f — — —]

ADDRESS—

Acquaint *now* yourselves with God,

1. Ye who are in a state of sin—

[Seek him in reading, meditation, prayer, &c.]

2. Ye who are in a state of suffering—

[Doubt not his willingness or sufficiency.]

^f Cant. ii. 3.

CCCCLXXIV.

THE UPRIGHT PERSON'S COMFORT UNDER AFFLICTIONS.

Job xxiii. 10. *He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

THE superior happiness of the godly above that of the ungodly is not so manifest in a season of prosperity as under circumstances of deep affliction. The world can rejoice in their portion as long as their pleasures are uninterrupted by bitter reflections or painful dispensations: but in trouble they have no refuge. The righteous, on the contrary, have less of thoughtless gaiety; but in time of trouble

they find abundant consolations. No man was ever beset with a greater complication of trials than Job; all of which were beyond measure heightened by the uncharitable censures of his friends: but still he found an inward support by reflecting upon,

I. His conscious integrity—

It is characteristic of God's children, that they are all upright before God—

[As there is a very considerable difference in the attainments of different men with respect to bodily strength and intellectual powers, notwithstanding all possess the same members and enjoy the same faculties, so is there with respect to piety also, notwithstanding all are upright in heart. From the very instant that a person is converted to God, he must of necessity hate sin, and long after a conformity to God's image: he cannot commit sin^a; he must be, according to the measure of grace given him, "an Israelite indeed, and without *allowed* guile." Nor does humility require us to confess ourselves hypocrites (*wilful* hypocrites, I mean) when God has quickened us by his Spirit; for it is not humility, but ingratitude and falsehood, to deny the work which God has wrought in us. Many of God's most eminent saints have spoken of their own integrity and rejoiced in it, and even pleaded it before God^b. And we also, by "proving every one of us our own work, may have rejoicing in ourselves, and not in another^c."]]

A consciousness of their own integrity is a rich source of consolation to them in a trying hour—

[There are times and seasons when almost all the other springs of comfort seem dried up: sometimes it may be painful even to reflect upon God^d. Job acknowledges in the context, that God's "presence was a trouble to him:" but knowing that God was acquainted with his heart, he could yet *appeal* to him respecting his own integrity: and from this source he derived a pleasing satisfaction, an encouraging hope. St. Paul, under a daily and hourly expectation of martyrdom, experienced much joy in the same thought^e: nor shall *we* find it a small consolation to us, under any trials we may be called to endure.]]

But Job found a yet further consolation in reflecting upon,

II. The expected issue of his trials—

^a 1 John iii. 9.

^b Ps. xvii. 2. 2 Kings xx. 3.

^c Gal. vi. 4.

^d Ps. lxxvii. 3.

^e 2 Cor. i. 8—12.

Though he was at present in as hot a furnace as he could possibly endure, yet he believed that he was put into it by a skilful Refiner, for the purifying of his soul from dross—

[They who are truly upright, learn to view the hand of God both in their comforts and their troubles: they know that affliction comes not by chance, but from the hand of Him who directs every thing with consummate wisdom. The ungodly look no further than to second causes; and therefore yield to murmuring and impatience whenever they receive evil from the hand of their fellow-creatures: but the godly are persuaded that their portion, whatever it be, is mixed for them by God himself, and that it is intended “to purge away their iniquity,” that they may be partakers of his holiness^f. This was evidently the view which Job had of troubles, notwithstanding they sprang from such various sources.]

An expectation of the benefit reconciled him to the means used for his good—

[No one can love trouble on its own account; since it is “never joyous, but grievous.” But sanctification is the highest wish of the upright soul: it is regarded as a pearl that cannot be purchased at too high a price. Trials, however painful, are welcomed, if they may but be the means of promoting this blessed end. Many have even dreaded the removal of them, lest with them they should lose also the benefits flowing from them. And, if we could have viewed the afflictions of Job in their true light, we should have preferred his condition when upon the dunghill far before that of his censorious friends. He was enabled to look forward to the end; and the event fully justified his expectations.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are in the furnace of affliction—

[Look above all second causes, and see God appointing the nature, measure, and duration of all your trials^g. “He brings the third part through the fire;” and appoints tribulation as your way to the kingdom. Let him accomplish his own will in his own way; and “what ye know not now, ye shall know hereafter.”]

2. Those who have been delivered from their troubles—

[When you were bowed down under the load of your afflictions, you probably thought how differently you would

^f Ps. xxxix. 9. Isai. xxvii. 9. Heb. xii. 10.

^g 2 Sam. xvi. 10.

live if God should hear your prayers, and deliver you. Now then remember the vows that are upon you^h. Provoke him not to visit you with yet heavier afflictions. As clouds succeed the rain, so do troubles come in succession while we are in this vale of tears. Endeavour then so to improve the past, that future troubles may find you better prepared for their reception, and every dispensation fit you for your eternal rest.]

3. Those who have never yet experienced any particular trials—

[A little outward religion will satisfy you in a state of ease and prosperity. But that will not be found sufficient in a time of trouble. The fire will try what your attainments are. Now therefore be in earnest about the work of salvation, that when affliction comes, it may be mitigated by the consolations of an upright mind, and not be aggravated by the accusations of a guilty conscience.]

^h Ps. lxvi. 10—15. and cxvi. 1—14.

CCCCLXXV.

JOB'S LOVE TO THE WORD OF GOD.

Job xxiii. 12. *I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.*

WHENCE arose this remarkable assertion? Was it a spontaneous and uncalled-for effusion of self-applause? or was it drawn forth by the circumstances in which this holy man was placed? If we look back to the preceding chapter, we find that Eliphaz had given him this counsel: "*Acquaint now thyself with God*, and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee. Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and *lay up his words in thy heart*." In answer to this, Job replies, "*O that I knew where I might find him!*" that I might come even to his seat! . . . Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right

^a Job xxii. 21, 22.

hand, that I cannot see him. . . . My foot hath held his steps; *his way have I kept*, and not declined: neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; *I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food*^b."

I will call your attention to these latter words,

I. As an honour to Job—

What sacred records Job possessed, I know not: but certainly he had some, either written or traditional: and to these he had respect, "esteeming them more than his necessary food."

His desire after them was more ardent—

[A man may feel no great appetite for dainties; but for his necessary food he cannot but feel a most intense desire. Hunger and thirst will in time so oppress a man, that he will gladly part with all that he possesses in the world to satisfy their pressing demands. In the famine that was in Egypt, the whole people of the country sold their lands, yea, their very bodies, to Pharaoh, for a supply of necessary food^c. Yea, on some occasions, women have eaten their own children, to satisfy the calls of nature. Yet was Job's desire after the words of God more urgent than any pressure of the natural appetite for bodily food.]

His delight in them was more exquisite—

[The sacred records are represented to us as "a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined^d." Yet this, methinks, conveys but a very inadequate idea of the delight which the promises of God afford to a weary heavy-laden soul. Doubtless to one nearly famished with hunger and thirst, the necessary food, how common soever it may be, is exceeding sweet: but not so sweet as were God's words to Job; so much more exquisite was the satisfaction which they afforded to his soul than any of which his bodily frame was capable.]

His refreshment from them was more abiding—

[Elijah, after a hearty meal, "went in the strength of his meat forty days and forty nights^e." And Jonathan, after a day's extreme fatigue, did but taste a little honey, and his strength was renovated in a very extraordinary degree^f. But the strength which God's blessed word imparted to Job was

^b ver. 3, 8—12.

^c Gen. xlvii. 19.

^d Isai. xxv. 6.

^e 1 Kings xix. 5—8.

^f 1 Sam. xiv. 29, 30.

visible in every part of his life. Truly "*it enlightened his eyes,*" insomuch that his discernment of God's truth was incomparably clearer than that of any of his friends who came to instruct and comfort him: for God himself says of them, that "they had not spoken of him the thing that was right, as his servant Job had^s." And, as it informed his understanding, so *it strengthened him to bear* his trials with a degree of confidence and composure never surpassed by mortal man. In immediate connexion with my text, he says, "God knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold^h." And St. James represents him, in this respect, as the most perfect pattern to the Church in all ages: "Ye have heard of the patience of Jobⁱ." I may add further, his love to the word of God was that to which we must trace *the whole of that obedience* which he so feelingly describes: "My foot hath held his steps; his ways have I kept, and not declined; neither have I gone back from the commandments of his lips: I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food^k."]

Let me yet further pursue this subject,

II. As a reproach to us—

How much fuller a revelation of God's mind do we possess!

[Doubtless Job's views, both of himself as a sinner, and of Christ as a Saviour, were, in many respects, clear and just^l. But how incomparably richer is that discovery of God's revealed will, which is transmitted to us in the writings of the Old and New Testament! There is nothing concealed from us, which it would be for our advantage to know. All the eternal counsels of God, as displayed in the covenant of grace, are exhibited to our view, together with all the wonders of redeeming love. How highly, then, should these be estimated by us! If Job felt such regard for the partial revelations vouchsafed to him, what should not we feel towards this complete system of divine truth, which we are privileged to enjoy?]

But how low is the esteem in which it is held by *us*!

[Not only is "our necessary food" preferred before it, but every base indulgence: the gratifications of sense which are most sinful, and the acquisition of objects which are most worthless, have a greater preponderance in our minds than either the Law of Moses or "the glorious Gospel of the

^s Job xlii. 7.

^h Job xxiii. 10.

ⁱ Jam. v. 11.

^k Job xxiii. 11, 12.

^l Job ix. 20, 21. and xix. 25—27.

blessed God." Let us only look back, and see how faint have been our desires after divine knowledge, and how feeble our endeavours to obtain it. In truth, every book has been preferred before the sacred volume: and, with almost every one amongst us, the perusal of a novel or a newspaper would be resorted to, at any time, to occupy a leisure hour, rather than God's blessed word.

To what is our ignorance of heavenly subjects to be ascribed, but to this? And to what else must our disobedience to God's commandments be traced? We love not God's word, and therefore we do not study it: we explore not its contents, and therefore we neither know it nor obey it. Though it ought to be our meditation and delight all the day^m, with many the sacred volume is scarcely ever read at all: and with those who do occasionally take it into their hands, it is read only in a superficial manner, and without that veneration and love which it deserves. I say, then, that Job may well rise up in judgment against us, to condemn us for our grievous neglect of that sacred volume, which even "the angels in heaven desire to look intoⁿ."]

APPLICATION—

Redeem, then, the time which you have lost, for the attainment of divine knowledge—

[Were the salvation of your soul out of the question, God's blessed word deserves more attention than any other book: for there is no other book whose contents are so curious, so instructive, so edifying in every view. But, when the salvation of your soul depends on your obedience to it, what shall I say? Methinks, you should be studying it day and night, in order to obtain all its proffered benefits, and to comply with all its most reasonable demands. In public, when it is opened to you in the ministration of the Gospel, "receive it, not as the word of man, but as the word of the living God." And in your secret chamber study it, as it were, upon your knees; and implore of God the teaching of his Holy Spirit, in order that you may be able to comprehend its mysterious contents. In a word, esteem the revelation of your God as Job esteemed it: and then, like Job, shall you have a record on high, that you pleased God, and that you were accepted of him.]

^m Ps. i. 2. See Jer. xv. 16.

ⁿ 1 Pet. i. 12.

CCCCLXXVI.

REBELLING AGAINST THE LIGHT.

Job xxiv. 13. *They are of those that rebel against the light.*

WE cannot understand any part of the Book of Job aright, unless we continually keep in mind the subject in dispute between Job and his friends; they labouring incessantly to convince him, that the judgments with which he was visited were marks of God's indignation against him, on account of some secret wickedness he had practised; and he endeavouring to prove to them, that God's dealings with men in this world were no proper tests of their character; since even the most abandoned of mankind, in many instances, prospered in this world, and passed through life without any visible marks of God's displeasure. Amongst persons of this character, he mentions "those who rebel against the light;" who form, indeed, a very large portion of the community in every age and in every country under heaven.

We shall find it not unprofitable to inquire,

I. Who they are that are obnoxious to this charge—

The expression, "rebellious against the light," may be taken both in a literal and a figurative sense. Accordingly, we must comprehend under this description those who rebel,

1. Against the light of *day*—

[This, in fact, is the primary import of the expression in my text: for Job himself goes on to illustrate his meaning by the conduct of murderers and adulterers, both of whom shun the light of day, which would expose them to observation, and affect the darkness of night, as more favourable to their pursuits. "The murderer," says he, "rising with the light, killeth the poor and needy: and *in the night is as a thief*. The eye also of the adulterer waiteth for *the twilight*, saying, No eye shall see me; and disguiseth his face. *In the dark* they dig through houses which they had marked for themselves in the day-time: *they know not the light*: for the morning is to them even as the shadow of death: if one know them, they are

in the terrors of the shadow of death^a." Hence such persons are called "children of the night and of darkness," in opposition to the godly, who are termed "children of the light and of the day^b;" the one choosing *the night* as the season for their wicked transactions, and the other *the day* for their labours which affect the light. The truth is, that God has given the light of day on purpose that his people may be enabled to serve and honour him in their different vocations: but the persons here spoken of discard the light, denying to it their acknowledgment of its superiority, and giving a decided preference to darkness, which alone is suited to such a conduct as they pursue. This is "*rebellion against the light*," inasmuch as it is a withholding from it those services which the Creator himself has assigned it, and which its peculiar properties demand.]

2. Against the light of *conscience*—

[Conscience is God's vicegerent in the soul of man. Under its direction and government all, without exception, are placed. The heathen, who have no written law to regulate their conduct, and are therefore "a law unto themselves," are under the control of this faculty; which either "accuses or excuses them," according as they demean themselves in accordance with the law of their minds, or as they oppose and violate its dictates^c. And whoever disobeys its motions is altogether "inexcusable" before God^d. True indeed, many, whilst following their conscience, sin grievously against God, as Paul did, when he persecuted the followers of Christ. But his sin consisted, not in following the dictates of his conscience, but in not having his conscience better informed. The obeying of the voice of conscience, *so far as that alone is considered*, is always right; and to rebel against it is always wrong. And who is there that has not transgressed in this way? Who is there that, having known what was evil, has not committed it; and, having known what was good, has not neglected to perform it? St. James tells us plainly, that to "rebel thus against the light" is sin: "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin^e."]

3. Against the light of *revelation*—

[God has given us "his word to be a light to our feet, and a lantern to our paths:" and he requires that we obey it without reserve. But where has it its legitimate control? Where does it reign with unrestricted sway? Alas! whether amongst Jews or Christians, its influence is very limited: any

^a ver. 14, 17.

^b 1 Thess. v. 5—7.

^c Rom. ii. 14, 15.

^d Rom. i. 20, 21.

^e Jam. iv. 17.

worldly interest, any carnal gratification, is quite sufficient to overpower it. Not even the Gospel itself, with all the wonders of redeeming love, can operate so as to subject men to its dominion. See, I pray you, and consider, Who regards *the Law* as a rule of life? Who yields himself to *the Gospel*, so as to have his soul "cast into it as into a mould," and so as to be "formed by it into the image of our God?" Look round the world, and see how few are really in subjection to it. Even where the Gospel is preached in its utmost simplicity, the great mass of those who hear it "rebel against the light," and "walk on still in darkness."]

But, not to speak of others, let us consider,

II. How far we ourselves are implicated in it—

In order to bring it home to ourselves, let us call to mind particularly,

1. Our indulgence of secret sins—

[Let us look at those who are yet in a state of childhood, and see what frequent deviations from truth and honesty are to be found amongst them; insomuch, that it is almost a miracle if a single individual be found who cannot call to mind some violations of his duty in these respects. Let us trace our lives up to manhood, and see what each successive year has brought forth; in how many instances we have harboured thoughts which we could not have dared to express in words; yea, and uttered in words, to a fellow-creature, what we should not have dared to utter in the hearing of a man of God; yea, perhaps I may say, have carried also into effect, when, if an intelligent and pious friend had been present, it would have been impossible for us to have acted as we did. As for God's presence, we thought not of it. It was sufficient for us that we were not seen by man. If we have had reason to fear that our sin was discovered, we have been filled with shame and sorrow: but, if we have eluded human observation, we have thought little of the eye of God. In a word, to a sense of our own honour and credit in the world we have been all alive; but, to the approbation of our God we have been indifferent.

In speaking on this subject, I may fitly mention the artifices of trade and commerce, which, in fact, constitute the great art of rising in the world, and without which it is scarcely possible for a man to gain a livelihood. Yet, all these arts of adulteration and deceit are practised in secret, without any regard to God or conscience. I wish all of you, Brethren, from the oldest to the youngest, in whatever rank you move, and whatever office in life you fill, to examine whether the sins incident to your age and station are not indulged by you,

so far as the habits of the world will sanction them, without any fear of God. Truly, there is not one amongst us, who, if he will suffer conscience to speak the truth, must not acknowledge, that he has "rebelled against the light" in instances without number, yea, and it is to be feared, in instances too which he could not endure to have published to the world at large.]

2. Our neglect of acknowledged duties—

[Who, that has ever heard the Gospel, does not know the two great leading requirements of it; namely, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ?" Yet, who complies with them? Who calls his ways to remembrance, and mourns over all the evils of his former life, and humbles himself before God in dust and ashes? Who goes to God from day to day, imploring mercy at his hands in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and wrestling with him, as it were, in prayer, till he obtains an answer of peace? Who "lives altogether by faith in the Lord Jesus," "receiving out of his fulness those supplies of grace and strength which are necessary for him, and goes forth in dependence upon Christ to glorify his God in all holy obedience? Alas! alas! we acknowledge readily enough what the light of the Gospel requires; but we "rebel against it." And this, as our Lord says, is the very point which so greatly offends our God: "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil^f." In fact, it is this which renders men so averse to be told *in private* what they are accustomed to hear *in public*: "for every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved: whereas, he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God^g." Let us, then, only look at the daily habit of our minds, in relation to these things, and we shall see how deeply we all, without exception, are implicated in the guilt which is imputed to those who rebel against the light.]

BEHOLD, then,

1. How amazing has been the forbearance of God towards us!

[God has seen all our wickedness, however secret, whether it has been in a way of commission, or of omission. "The darkness has been no darkness with him; but the night and the day to him are both alike." How wonderful then is it,

^f John iii. 19.

^g John iii. 20, 21.

that he has borne with *us*, and not taken us away in the midst of our sins: when, if I may so say, he might have cut us off to advantage, and made us most distinguished monuments of his displeasure! How wonderful, too, that when he has seen the whole world, and all the iniquity that has been perpetrated in it, he has borne with us so long, and not consumed us utterly, as Sodom and Gomorrha! Let us, then, acknowledge “this long-suffering of God to be salvation^h,” and let it convince us, that he is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and live!” — — —]

2. What a mercy is it that the light is yet continued to us!

[From many churches God has removed the candlestick, when those who enjoyed the light persisted in rebellion against it. But we, Brethren, have the light continued to us, the light of *day*; being preserved in life, when so many have been taken away long before they attained to our age; the light of *conscience*, too, which so many have been left to “sear as with a hot iron;” and the light of *revelation*, which yet sounds in our ears, and invites us to accept of mercy through the Redeemer’s blood. O Brethren! how “little a while ye will have the light with you, God alone knows: but whilst you have the light, walk in the light, that ye may be the children of light^k.” Beg of God that the word ye hear may “not be a savour of death to your death and condemnation, but a savour of life to your eternal life and happiness.”]

3. How thankful should we be if conscience have in any measure its proper influence upon us!

[Does conscience smite you, Brethren? Be not in haste to close the wound: yea, beg of God that it may never be healed, but by the blood of Jesus Christ. Conviction is the very first work of the Spirit of God: and the deeper that is, the richer will be your consolations. And, when you have obtained peace with God, still let conscience sit enthroned in your soul, to regulate your every act, and every word, and every thought, according to the mind and will of God. Entreat of God to make your conscience tender as the apple of your eye: and, if but a mote offend it, let it never rest there, but weep it out with tears of penitential sorrow, and get the guilt of it also washed away in the blood of Christ. In a word, endeavour to “walk in the light, as God is in the light; and then shall God and you have fellowship one with the other; and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, shall cleanse you from all sin^l.”]

^h 2 Pet. iii. 15.

ⁱ 2 Pet. iii. 9.

^k John xii. 35, 36.

^l 1 John i. 7.

CCCCLXXVII.

SELF-REPROACH.

Job xxvii. 6. *My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.*

JOB had been represented by God as a perfect and upright man : and the severe trials he was called to endure served only to prove the truth of that assertion. True it is that he was occasionally driven by the unkindness of his friends and the depth of his sufferings to speak without due reverence for the Supreme Being ; but never were the predictions of Satan, or the accusations of his own friends, verified respecting him. His whole life had been a continued course of piety and virtue : and he determined, through grace, that nothing should divert him from it. Being conscious that he had maintained his integrity hitherto before God, he would not suffer his uncharitable friends to rob him of the comfort which that consciousness afforded him in this hour of trial : “ he held fast his righteousness, and would not let it go.” And being determined to preserve the same blessed course even to the end, he said, “ My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.”

Of all the blessings that man can enjoy in this life, there is none greater than the testimony of a good conscience : without it, not all the world can make us happy ; and with it, we find support under all the calamities that can come upon us. Let us then consider,

I. The proper office of conscience—

Whilst we acknowledge that there are no innate ideas which obtain universally amongst the children of men, we affirm that there is in every man an innate capacity to judge of, yea, and an innate power that *will* sit in judgment upon, his actions, and *will* pronounce a sentence of condemnation or acquittal upon him, according as he obeys or violates the law, by which he conceives himself bound to regulate his life. To this effect St. Paul, speaking of the Gentiles,

says, that they, not having the written law, are a law unto themselves; and that their conscience accuses or excuses them, according as they demean themselves in reference to that law^a.

From hence we see that the office of conscience is two-fold;

1. To judge of what is past—

[God, who will pass judgment upon all men at the last day, has appointed conscience to be, as it were, his vicegerent in the hearts of men, and to testify to them beforehand what sentence they are to expect at his tribunal: nor is it of actions only that it is constituted a judge, but of dispositions, of motives, and of all the most secret workings of the heart. If evil be committed by us in act, word, or thought, it is to condemn us, even though the whole world should resound with our praise: and, on the other hand, it is to bear testimony in our favour, and to acquit us, if we are innocent, even though men and devils should combine to load us with reproach. Its office, as an accuser, is strikingly exhibited in those who brought to our Lord the woman taken in adultery: when he bade the person who was without sin amongst them to cast the first stone at her, they all went out successively “from the eldest to the last,” every one of them standing condemned in his own mind^b. We are not necessarily to conclude, that they had all been guilty of the same particular sin; but that every one of them had some grievous sin brought to his remembrance, by which he was convinced that he himself was not a fit person to use severity towards her. Our Lord did not lay any specific sin to their charge; nor were the spectators able to accuse them: but conscience did its office: and they were unable to withstand its potent sway. Many glorious instances also are recorded of the power of conscience to support the mind under the severest trials. The very instance of Job which we are now considering, evinces this: and the solemn appeals which David, and Paul, and others, have made to God himself respecting their integrity, prove, beyond a doubt, that the testimony of a good conscience will enable a man to rejoice, though suffering under the foulest aspersions and the most unfounded accusations^c — — —]

2. To direct in what is to come—

[Every man is bound to be regulated by his own conscience. We may sin indeed, and sin grievously, *whilst* fol-

^a Rom. ii. 15.

^b John viii. 7—9.

^c 2 Sam. xxiii. 21—25. 2 Cor. i. 12, 17, 18, 23. See also Acts xxiii. 1. and Rom. ix. 1, 2.

lowing the dictates of our conscience; but our sin will consist, not in doing what we think to be right, but in not taking care to have our conscience better informed. Even supposing any line of conduct to be right in itself, we ought not to do it, unless we believe it to be right: for "whatsoever is not of faith, is sin^d." We ought to be "thoroughly persuaded in our own minds^e:" if we doubt respecting the proper line of duty, we should wait, and inquire, and pray, till we see our way clear; especially if the doubt have respect to the *morality* of the action^f. There may be doubts about some particular circumstances which can never be fully resolved; and in them we must follow the line which expediency prescribes: but where duty can by any means be ascertained, then we should exert ourselves to the uttermost to learn the will of God, and then follow the path which we apprehend he will most approve.]

But, that we may mark more distinctly the office of conscience in relation to this point, we shall proceed to notice,

II. Our duty with respect to it—

Whilst conscience is given to us to preserve us from all moral evil, we are bound on our part to preserve it in a lively and vigorous state. It is our duty,

1. To consult its records—

[Unobserved by us, it notices from time to time the quality of our actions, and frequently assigns to them a very different character from that which a common observer would imagine them to bear. But if we forbear to consult its records, they become gradually fainter, till they are almost wholly effaced. Scarcely an hour, and certainly not a day, should ever pass, without our retiring, as it were, to converse with it. What hast thou recorded concerning me this day? What is thy testimony respecting my morning addresses at the throne of grace? Were they such as became a poor sinful creature, redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, and altogether dependent on the operations of his grace? Were they full of gratitude for mercies received, of contrition for sins committed, of earnestness for future communications, and of affiance in him as a promise-keeping God? What hast thou recorded concerning my family devotions? What, of my tempers throughout the day? What, of the improvement of my time for God? What,

^d Rom. xiv. 23.

^e Rom. xiv. 5.

^f Rom. xiv. 22.

of my zeal for his honour? What, of my labours for the eternal welfare of my fellow-creatures? Thus, as the Apostle says, "We should examine ourselves," and "prove our own selves:" nay more, we should beg of God to search and try, not our ways only, but our inmost thoughts and desires, that so we may have a fuller knowledge of ourselves, and keep a conscience void of offence both towards God and man.]

2. To venerate its testimony—

[If we disregard its voice, we may soon silence it altogether, yea, we may even "sear it" as with a hot iron, so as to make it "past feeling^s." We must remember whose voice it is, even the voice of God himself, speaking in our hearts. Were God to speak by an audible voice from heaven, we should hear and tremble: the fear of his Majesty would alarm us. But his Majesty is the same, whether he speak in thunders and in earthquakes, or in a still small voice: and he should be listened to with the same reverence in the one case, as in the other. It is his testimony respecting us; and agreeably to that we should estimate both our character and our prospects. "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things: but, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God^h."]]

3. To obey its dictates—

[Nothing can justify a violation of its commands. Whatever conscience prescribes, we should do it without hesitation and without delay. Nothing should intimidate us, nothing deter us: we should not count our lives dear in comparison of its testimony in our favour. Like the Hebrew youths, we should be resolute, though menaced with all the sufferings that tyrannic cruelty can inflict. And here it may be useful to observe, that *the first testimony of conscience is generally the most just, and most to be depended on*. We may by reasonings bewilder conscience, so that it shall not know what testimony to give; or we may by leaning to the side of our passions or our interests bias it to give a directly contrary testimony to that which it first suggested: it is therefore of peculiar importance to bear in mind our first impressions: for though they may not be always right, and may be corrected by the acquisition of further light and knowledge, yet they may be always considered as more pure and unadulterated, and therefore as deserving of more peculiar attention.]

4. To get it enlightened and rectified—

[This, though mentioned last, must be attended to in the

^s 1 Tim. iv. 2.

^h 1 John iii. 20, 21.

first place. If we navigate the seas with a compass, we must take care that that compass be true to the pole, and not be under any undue influence to impede its motions. If that be drawn aside by a magnet, it will, instead of assisting us in our voyage, infallibly drive us on rocks and quicksands. Thus St. Paul could say, that he had lived "in all good conscience" from his youth up; but, being blinded by his prejudices, and "thinking he *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus," he was for a long time a most determined enemy of Christ and his Church. Afterwards, when he was enlightened and *renewed* by the Spirit of God, he changed his course, and became as zealous for Christ as ever he had been against him. No pains therefore should be esteemed too great for the acquiring of divine knowledge: we should study the Holy Scriptures with all diligence: we should cry mightily to God for the influences of his Spirit to guide us into all truth; and we should keep our minds open to conviction upon all points that will admit of doubt. Especially we should entreat of God to give us a single eye: for, "if our eye be single, our whole body will be full of light; but if our eye be evil, our whole body will be full of darkness: and, *if the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!*"

We cannot better improve this subject than by suggesting to you some salutary CAUTIONS. Guard then against,

1. An evil and guilty conscience—

[Many continue all their days impenitent, whilst yet they *know* that they are guilty before God — — — O let none of you rest satisfied with such a state as this. If sin be not repented of, and washed away in the blood of Jesus Christ, it will abide upon your souls to all eternity. And will any of you continue in a state of guilt and condemnation, when God is ready to put you into "the fountain that was opened for sin and for uncleanness?" Know assuredly that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin^k;" and that, being once cleansed in it, you shall "have no more conscience of sin," so as to be under any distressing apprehensions on account of it^l; since, whilst it "purges you from an evil conscience, it will stimulate you to serve the living God^m."]

2. A partial and deluded conscience—

[It is surprising how partial the consciences of many are: they can see no evil at all in some things which suit their

ⁱ Compare Zech. xii. 1. with John v. 2—9.

^k 1 John i. 7.

^l Heb. x. 2.

^m Heb. ix. 9, 14.

inclination, whilst they are shocked at the very mention of other things which are in themselves altogether indifferent: "they strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." The Pharisees would not for the world eat with unwashed hands; but they would devour widows' houses without a moment's hesitation: they would bribe a man to betray his Lord; but, on the restoration of the money, they would on no account put it into the treasury, because it was the price of blood. Thus it is at this day, with persons of every description. We should be glad if we could say that all religious professors were exempted from the charge; but there are many even of them who would account it a heinous crime to deviate from the rules of their own sect or party, who yet will violate both truth and honesty in their dealings with the world. Such persons will say, "My heart shall not reproach me as long as I live;" but we hope their consciences will reproach them before it is too late: for, if they continue to harbour any one allowed sin, whether in act or in heart, they are no better than self-deceiving hypocrites; and their religion will be found vain at lastⁿ."]

3. An over-confident and unfeeling conscience—

[Though a scrupulous conscience is an evil to be lamented, yet a tender conscience is above all things to be desired: it should be kept tender, even as the apple of our eye. The smallest deviation from our duty, either to God or man, ought to pain us in our inmost souls. How lovely was the spirit of David, when his heart smote him for cutting off the skirt of Saul's garment, when, in the judgment of the world at large, he would have been justified in putting his malignant and implacable enemy to death. Thus should it be with us: if only a thought of our heart be in any respect contrary to God's mind and will, we should be humbled in the dust; and our incessant labour should be, "to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God;" or, in other words, to be "holy as God is holy," and "perfect even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."]

ⁿ Jam. i. 27.

CCCCLXXVIII.

SPIRITUAL DECLENSION CONSIDERED.

Job xxix. 2. *O that I were as in months past!*

TO take a retrospect of our past lives is always profitable: but it is not unfrequently attended with

much pain. The man that has lived as without God in the world, how can he look back upon the days that are past, without feeling the deepest anguish of mind? Nor is a review of former days less distressing to one who from a life of spiritual peace and joy has fallen into a state of darkness and of spiritual death.

The change which Job had experienced, was both outward, in all that related to the body, and inward, in what related to his soul. The circumstances attendant on that change were so peculiar, that they are but little applicable to the Church at large: and the design of God in them was also very peculiar; it being not so much to punish the sin which yet remained in his servant, as to display, confirm, and augment the grace that had been imparted to him. Into these peculiarities we shall not enter; because, though they might instruct and amuse our minds, they would not come home to men's business and bosoms, or lead us sufficiently to a contemplation of ourselves. His temporal calamities we shall altogether overlook: and his spiritual troubles we shall notice only in a general view, as affording occasion for us to take a review of our past lives, and to see whether we have not reason for a similar complaint, "O that I were as in months past!" There had been a time when, as Job says, "the candle of God had shined upon his head, so that by the light of it he had been enabled to walk through darkness," and when "God himself was with him," and "the secret of God was upon his tabernacle." So it may have been with us; and yet a most painful reverse have taken place. And so important do I conceive this subject to be, that I shall endeavour to cast upon it what light I can in the compass of one short discourse. A person anxious to know the state of his soul before God, would be ready to ask, *What are the usual causes and precursors of spiritual declension? Whereby shall I ascertain whether it has taken place in me? and how, if such a change has taken place, shall I regain my former happy condition?* To answer

these questions, I will proceed, in a brief and partial manner, to point out the *sources*, the *evidences*, and the *remedies* of spiritual declension.

I. The sources of it—

It is obvious that, were we to attempt a full discussion of the subject, a whole volume would scarcely suffice for the consideration of it. We must therefore of necessity confine ourselves to a few leading topics, leaving a multitude of others, of nearly equal importance, untouched.

Amongst the sources which I will specify, the first is,

1. A remissness in secret duties—

[The duties of the closet, such as reading, and meditation, and prayer, are indispensably necessary to the welfare of the soul. As well might we hope that our bodies should retain their vigour without food and exercise, as that our souls should flourish without communion with God. The vegetable creation will not thrive without light; nor will the seed of Divine grace, which has been sown in our hearts, grow without the light of God's countenance. But this returns not unsought, like the light of day: it must be sought, and sought with care too, or else it will be withheld, and the soul will be left to languish in darkness and distress. And in this respect is that word of our Saviour verified; "To him that hath, shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath^a."]]

2. An indulgence of some secret lust—

[Sin, of whatever kind it be, is "a worm at the root," which will soon make the fairest gourd in the universe to wither. It matters not what the sin be: it may be pride, or envy, or malice, or revenge, or lust, or covetousness, or discontent, or sloth, or unbelief, or vain conceit, or any other; every man has some "sin which more easily besets him:" and that, whatever it may be, will grieve the Spirit of God, and provoke God to hide his face from us. "Sin of any kind will separate between him and us," and deprive us of all his gracious communications: "If I regard iniquity in my heart," says David, "the Lord will not hear me." And our blessed Lord tells us, that "a right hand, or a right eye," not sacrificed and abandoned, will plunge us, both body and soul, "into hell-fire^b." No wonder then that any man declines in spiritual health,

^a Matt. xiii. 12.

^b Mark ix. 43—48.

whilst some unsubdued sin lurks within him, and, "like a cancer, eats up" all his strength^c.]

3. An undue and unnecessary entangling of ourselves in the affairs of this life—

[All have of necessity *some* worldly engagements, which it is their bounden duty diligently to perform. And many have a very great portion of their time necessarily occupied with worldly pursuits: nor are they at liberty to withdraw from a post which, though painful and difficult, God has evidently assigned them. But when we *needlessly* multiply our temporal concerns, we must expect to suffer loss in those which are spiritual. Our Saviour, in the parable of the sower, tells us, that the cause of vast multitudes not bringing forth fruit to perfection is, that "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word that has been sown in their hearts, and render it unfruitful." A man who "loads his feet with thick clay," or suffers a long garment to impede the motion of his feet, does not wonder that he makes an inadequate progress in a race: and as little can it be wondered at, if a person, encumbered, unnecessarily or beyond a due proportion, with the cares or pleasures of this life, make not his profiting to appear in the ways of God.]

Supposing a spiritual declension to have taken place in us, what may we expect to be,

II. The evidences of it—

Spiritual decay will doubtless discover itself in every exercise of the soul, even as bodily weakness does in every function of the body. But, to instance it in two or three particulars. We may be sure that a declension has taken place, if we have suffered loss,

1. In the spirituality of our minds—

[In a soul that is in full health, there is a tendency upwards, not unlike that of a vessel or balloon, filled with light and buoyant air: it is fastened, as it were, by cords to the earth; but it discovers its proper tendency by repeated and continued efforts to ascend: and, as different cords are loosened, its efforts are more and more visible: and, when the last cord is cut asunder, it mounts to the heavens, as the regions it most affects. Thus the soul, in proportion as it is "filled with the Spirit," aspires heavenward. But, if the vessel before referred to lose its buoyant powers, it ceases its aerial flight, and descends upon

^c 2 Tim. ii. 17.

the earth: and from the effect no one is at a loss to infer the cause.

I will grant, that a pressure of worldly engagements may operate unfavourably in appearance, whilst there is no cause for self-condemnation in reality. The way to form an accurate judgment is, not so much to inquire, Whether the flights of the soul heavenward are less frequent than they were under different circumstances? as, What the tendencies of the soul are, when it is left at liberty to pursue the course it most affects? And, if in these seasons it evinces a heaviness and an indisposition to ascend, then may it be clearly seen, that the soul has suffered loss; and in proportion as it ceases to dwell in God by faith and love, God will cease to dwell in it by the vital energies of his Spirit: and then "its root will soon be as rottenness; and its blossom will go up as dust^d."

2. In the tenderness of our conscience—

[The effect of grace is to make the conscience tender as the apple of the eye; to make us dread sin, and flee temptation, and use all possible means for the preserving of the soul pure before God. In one who is walking close with God, even a mote will not be suffered willingly to retain the place it has invaded; but will be wept out with tears of penitence and shame. But, if the conscience have lost its sensibility, so that it can now endure without emotion a feeling which would once have filled it with the acutest anguish, what shall we say? Can that soul be in a flourishing condition?

We must distinguish doubtless between a scrupulous and a tender conscience: for increasing light may have lessened its scrupulosity about indifferent matters, whilst yet its tenderness is undiminished in reference to every acknowledged duty. But, if the smaller commissions of sin or neglects of duty pass with less grief and indignation against them than formerly, the authority of God is weakened in the soul, the hatred of sin diminished; and, if a remedy be not speedily applied, "the last state of that soul will be worse than its beginning."]

3. In the vigour of our exertions for God—

[A man that is right with God will always be saying, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" No labour will be grudged, no sacrifice accounted great, if only God may be glorified in him. But if the self-denial which once appeared unworthy of a thought is now become a burthen, and the efforts which once we made in the service of our God are now relaxed, we obviously have declined in real piety. Were we right, we should

^d Isai. v. 24.

never think we had attained any thing as long as any thing was left to be attained, or done any thing as long as any thing was left to be done: but, forgetting what was behind, we should reach forward to that which was before: and our grief would be, that we could not do a thousand times more for Him who has done and suffered so much for us. If we are faint and weary in well-doing, it is plain and indisputable that our spiritual health has declined.]

Such backslidings however are not incurable, if only we apply, according to God's prescription,

III. The remedies of it—

We may regain our former state,

1. By a renewed and more solemn repentance—

[This is the remedy prescribed by our Lord himself to the angel of the Church of Ephesus, when he "had left his first love:" "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works*." We must look back and search out the occasions of our departure from God: we must then examine the instances wherein our departure has appeared. For these we must abase ourselves before God in dust and ashes: and we must again and again apply to the blood of sprinkling for the remission of them. Not content with this, we must return to those better ways which we have forsaken, and resolutely give up ourselves with all our powers to the service of our God. If our grief was deep at our first turning unto God, it ought to be tenfold deeper now, in proportion as our guilt by reason of our backslidings from God is aggravated beyond that which we contracted by our rebellions in the days of our ignorance. We should add fasting also to prayer. If, as our Lord says, "The days come when the Bridegroom shall be *taken away* from them; and *then shall they fast*;" how much more ought we to fast, when by our own unfaithfulness we have *driven* the Bridegroom from us! We need only mark the neglect into which this duty has fallen, in order to see how low the standard of religion is, which is current in the world. But, if we would recover the peace and purity that we have lost, we must return unto God with the deepest contrition, and wash us from our guilt in the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness.]

2. By getting a sense of redeeming love into the soul—

[Without this, repentance will be of little avail. That will prepare the soul; but it is a sight of Christ only that will

* Rev. ii. 4, 5.

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3. In the vigour of our exertions for God—

[A man that is right with God will always be saying, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" No labour will be grudged, no sacrifice accounted great, if only God may be glorified in him. But if the self-denial which once appeared unworthy of a thought is now become a burthen, and the efforts which once we made in the service of our God are now relaxed, we obviously have declined in real piety. Were we right, we should

^d Isai. v. 24.

you as in the months that are past; yea, and your last days shall be your best.]

2. Those who are making a progress in the divine life—

[Thrice happy souls! “To you to live is Christ; and to die it shall be gain.” How sweet is it to have the testimony of our conscience that we are living nigh to God, and walking daily in the light of his countenance! This is the way to be truly happy. This is the way to secure peace in a dying hour. “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.” Go on then; but not in your own strength, nor with unhallowed confidence. “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” Yet let not this consideration fill you with slavish fear, but only make you watchful and dependent on God. God is able to keep you; and he will keep the feet of his saints; and, if only you commit your way entirely to him, he will “preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom.”

“Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen^k.”]

^k Jude, ver. 24, 25.

CCCCCLXXIX.

JOB'S CHARACTER.

Job xxix. 11—16. *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not, I searched out.*

TO boast of one's own goodness is a sure mark of vanity and folly: of vanity, because it betrays an undue desire of man's applause; and of folly, because it defeats its own end, and injures the reputation which it is intended to exalt. Nevertheless there are occasions on which we may, without any impropriety, declare facts, notwithstanding the mention of them

does tend to proclaim our own praise. If, for instance, we have been calumniated, we may vindicate ourselves; and, if false charges have been adduced against us, we may refute them, by a candid and explicit statement of the truth. It was in this way that Job was led to speak of himself as he does in the passage before us. His friends had not only concluded from his extraordinary sufferings that he must have been peculiarly wicked, but they had undertaken even to specify crimes of which he had been guilty, and for which this afflictive dispensation had been sent^a. It was in answer to these unfounded charges that he delivered, what appears like an eulogium upon himself, but what was indeed nothing more than an appeal to facts for the establishment of his own innocence.

To *us* it is a singular benefit that such a statement was ever made; because it shews us, not only what our character ought to be, but what has actually been attained.

In order to make a suitable improvement of the passage, we propose to shew,

I. The excellence of this character—

From the particulars which are here enumerated we may distinctly notice,

1. The character itself—

[The first thing that attracts our notice is, Job's *diffusive benevolence*. Misery, wherever it could be found, was the object of his tender compassion and assiduous regard: and the greater that misery was, the more imperious did he consider his call to relieve it. Were they poor, or blind, or lame, or widows, or fatherless, or friendless, he felt as a father towards them, and laboured to supply their every want. In the exercise of that benevolence he shewed the most *active zeal*. He did not stay till his interposition was sought for: but went to the most frequented parts of the city, and "prepared his seat in the street^b," in order that all might have the readiest access to him, and be encouraged to spread their wants before him. Cases of considerable difficulty often occurred; but he spared no pains to inform himself of whatever might throw light upon the

^a Job xxii. 5—10.

^b ver. 7.

question, and to search to the bottom the truth or falsehood of every assertion, the force or nullity of every claim. No labour was accounted great, when it might tend to the relief of trouble or the confirmation of right. To this he added *unblemished integrity*. Nothing could for a moment bias his judgment, or induce him to swerve from the path of equity. It sometimes happened that he had to deal with powerful oppressors; but he was unawed by power, as well as unmoved by wealth: yea, the more power he found on the side of injustice, the more determinately he set himself to reduce it within its proper bounds: "he brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth:" and the effecting of this he accounted more honourable than any ornaments, either of magisterial robes, or of an imperial diadem^c.]

2. The excellence of it—

[See what was thought of it by all who beheld it in Job: "When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me." And we ask, Where is the man in the whole universe that must not admire it? What part of it is there that is not worthy of our imitation? That such a character will not be censured, we by no means affirm: but no man will censure benevolence, or zeal, or integrity, *as such*; they must first put a wrong construction upon it, before they will venture to utter one word against it.

From viewing it *in itself*, let us contemplate it *in its aspect on society*. What incalculable good must not arise from it! See but a single *magistrate* possessed of wisdom, of integrity, of power: see him laying out all his time, his strength, his influence in the composing of differences and in the relieving of every species of distress: see him doing this with disinterested zeal and unwearied diligence: will not such an one be esteemed as the "father of the poor?" and will he not "make many a widow's heart to sing for joy?" See a *minister* of such a description, devoting himself with equal zeal to the administering of temporal comforts to the poor, and superadding a similar attention to their spiritual necessities: to how many will he be made a source of good, becoming "eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame!" Surely in many instances "the blessing of him that was ready to perish" will come on such a minister, and the eyes and ears of multitudes will bear witness to him. The same is equally true of *all that are in private life*, according to the extent of their sphere and the steadiness of their exertions. And if once such were to become the general character of society, it would go far to banish evil, moral as well as temporal, from the world.]

^c ver. 14.

The excellence of this character being established, we will proceed to mark,

II. The importance of cultivating it in ourselves, and of encouraging it in others—

1. Of cultivating it in ourselves—

[Were there nothing more than the acquiring of such intrinsic worth, and the being so assimilated to Jesus, “who went about doing good,” it were most desirable that we should be imitators of this holy man. But a resemblance to him is not merely *desirable*; it is *necessary*: for *by our conformity to his character we must judge of our state before God; and by it we shall be judged in the last day.*

The highest attainments, whether of knowledge or of faith, are nothing in God's estimation, without an active, constant, self-denying exercise of love^d. *This* is the test by which we are to try our religion. We are told expressly, “that pure and undefiled religion is, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction^e,” and that by “bearing one another's burthens we fulfil the law of Christ^f.” Without this, our faith is no better than the faith of devils^g, and all our professions of love to God are mere hypocrisy. God himself repeatedly appeals to us on this very subject, as though he were willing to abide by the testimony of our own consciences^h. To have any just evidence therefore that we belong to Christ, we must tread in the steps of holy Job. This is the rule prescribed by that loving and beloved disciple, John: “My little children, let us love, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth: for hereby know we that we are of the truth; and shall assure our hearts before himⁱ.” These are “the things that accompany salvation^k,” and by abounding in them we shall obtain a full assurance of hope^l, and an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord^m.

But these habits are also necessary, because by our proficiency in them we shall be judged in the last day. Who can read the account of the day of judgment as given us by Christ himself, and not wish that he had cultivated more the dispositions of Job? Who that lives for himself, does not see cause to tremble? Let us deeply consider and diligently weigh the declarations of Christⁿ, and we shall need no further arguments to prove the importance of cultivating love — —]

2. Of encouraging it in others—

^d 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^e Jam. ii. 14—19.

^f 1 John iii. 18, 19.

^g 2 Pet. i. 7, 10, 11.

^h Jam. i. 27.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 17. and iv. 20.

^j Heb. vi. 9, 10.

^k Matt. xxv. 34—36, 41—43.

^l Gal. vi. 2.

^m 1 John iii. 17. and iv. 20.

ⁿ Heb. vi. 11.

[It is thought by many, that it is better to distribute their alms themselves, than to do good through the medium of others. We grant that all may find proper objects of charity within their own immediate neighbourhood; and that, if every one would exert himself within his own circle, there would be little comparative need of persons to dispense our alms for us. But we know that some want time, some inclination, some ability, to seek out the poor, and to impart to them spiritual instruction with temporal relief. Though therefore we certainly admit that it is well to reserve a portion of our alms for our own personal distribution, yet we cannot but say that it is of peculiar importance to encourage the activity of others; for by that, *more extensive good is done—more grace is called forth into exercise—and more honour is brought to religion.*

More extensive good is done.—Numberless are the cases wherein the poor require more assistance than it would be possible for an individual to afford them. It is on this account that hospitals and other public charities have been so universally established. For the same reason a society for relieving the poor must be of the greatest utility, because that can be done out of a public fund which cannot be done out of a private purse. Moreover, where persons who have some degree of leisure and ability devote themselves to the various offices of charity, it must be supposed that they will acquire a greater fitness for the work, and consequently will perform it to more advantage. Besides, many, however fit for the work, and well disposed towards it, have not time to spare; and consequently much good must be left undone, if those who have time be not encouraged and enabled to improve it in this way.

More grace also is called forth into exercise.—We will suppose that in either case the same degree of grace is exercised both by the donor and the receiver of the alms: still the employing of the services of others has greatly the advantage; because it calls forth their graces, and strengthens in them a habit of benevolence. Methinks, it is like the training of soldiers for war; which gives them a martial spirit, and renders them more efficient in their work. Many there are, possessed of wisdom and piety, who yet, on account of the narrowness of their own circumstances, are unable to visit the poor; because they cannot shew their sympathy in such a way as to render it acceptable to the poor themselves. But, if they be employed as the dispensers of the charity of others, they have scope for all the finer feelings of their souls, and are enabled to “rejoice with them that rejoice, as well as to weep with them that weep.”

We may add further, that *more honour also is brought to religion.*—It is said by the enemies of the Gospel, that the doctrine of salvation by faith alone leads to a neglect and

contempt of good works. But, with Job, we will appeal to facts: Who are they that most abound in good works; those who *talk* about them, and profess to make them the ground of their hopes? or those who build all their hopes of salvation on Christ alone? Amongst which of these two classes shall we find those, who, not having funds of their own, are willing to become the almoners of others, that they may exert themselves with more effect in every office of love both to the bodies and the souls of men? The matter is too notorious to admit a doubt. And does not this tend to the honour of religion? and do not they consult the interests of religion, who encourage such societies? Yes: and our answer to all who decry our faith is, "Outdo us in good works^o."]

^o Here the excellence of *any particular charity* may be stated, with a suitable exhortation to support it.

CCCCLXXX.

THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH.

Job xxx. 23. *I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.*

WE cannot certainly know the ultimate intentions of Providence from any thing we either see or feel. A man to whom God has given a robust constitution, cannot therefore be sure that he shall attain to old age: nor can a man that is bowed down with complicated diseases, be certain that his health shall not be restored. Presumption too often attends the former state, and despair the latter; as appears in the instance of Job. In his prosperity he said, "I shall die in my nest," without living to experience any material trials: and in his adversity he felt confident that God, whom now he thought his enemy, was bringing him down to the grave; and that his present troubles would terminate in death. In both these opinions he was mistaken: he did experience very heavy afflictions: and those were succeeded by brighter days of happiness than ever he had before known. But though he erred as to the expectations he had formed respecting the time and manner of his death, his general assertion was founded in truth,

and conveys to us a most instructive lesson. Let us consider,

I. The truth affirmed—

Nothing can be more certain than that we shall all die—

[The grave is “the house appointed for all living.” Adam was doomed to it for his transgression^a, and all his posterity have been involved in his sentence^b. It is not in the power of wisdom, or strength, or riches, to avert the stroke of death^c. All, whatever be their rank or condition, must pay the debt of nature^d; whether we have lived in a palace or a cottage, the grave is the house in which we must all abide at last. The righteous are, in this respect, on a par with the wicked^e. The moment that God says to any, “Thy soul is required of thee,” “his body must return to its native dust, and his spirit must return unto Him that gave it^f.”]

And this is a truth universally acknowledged—

[Every one “knows” that he himself must die. We look back to the antediluvian world; and though we find that they lived eight or nine hundred years, they all died at last. Since that time, successive generations have come and passed away. Our own near ancestors are removed, and “their places know them no more.” There are few amongst us who have not, within a very few years, lost some friend or relative. And we all feel, that if we have not any disorder at present, we are at least liable to those diseases and decays which are daily weakening the strongest constitutions, and executing the Divine appointments in bringing us to the grave.

The *time* of our death, as we observed before, is known to none: but its approach is not for one moment doubted by any^g.]

As this thing is so plain, we hasten to,

II. The improvement we should make of it—

The certainty of death should,

1. Moderate our regards to the things of this world—

[Were our present possessions to abide with us for ever, there were some reason for our eagerness respecting them: but, as they are so soon to be removed from us, or we from them, it is folly to let them occupy so large a portion of our

^a Gen. ii. 17. and iii. 19.

^b Rom. v. 12. ^c Ps. xlix. 7—10.

^d Eccl. viii. 8.

^e Rom. viii. 10. Zech. i. 5.

^f Eccl. xii. 7.

^g Eccl. ix. 5.

affections — — — We are not greatly elated with the comforts of an inn, where we are to stop but an hour; nor are we greatly depressed with any want of comforts which we may find there: the thought of our stay there being so short, renders us comparatively indifferent to our present accommodations. Thus the thought, that "the Lord is at hand," should cause us to make "our moderation known unto all men"^h — — — This is elsewhere enforced by the Apostle in relation to every thing, whether pleasant or painful; all is but *a pageant* passing by; and whether the spectacle be mournful or joyous, it is scarcely sooner arrived that it vanishes from before our eyesⁱ. Our joys and our sorrows will both appear light and momentary, when viewed in reference to the transitoriness of what is visible, and the endless duration of the things invisible^k — — —]

2. Make us diligent in preparing for a better world—

[The time allotted us here, is given on purpose that we may prepare for another and a better state. If the present hour be not seized, all opportunity of securing happiness in another world will be lost — — — Should not this thought stimulate us to activity in the concerns of our souls? Solomon was clearly of this opinion^l; and so must every one, who reflects a moment on the comparative importance of time and eternity. If we could return hither after having once departed, or begin in the invisible world the work which we have neglected here, we might have some excuse: but to know that death and the grave are ready to swallow us up, and yet to trifle with the interests of the soul, which, if neglected now, are gone for ever, this, I say, is a madness, which credulity itself could never imagine to exist, if its existence were not daily and hourly before our eyes — — — The prayer of Moses is that which reason dictates, and which God approves: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom^m."]]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who know this truth, and *feel* it—

[Happy they whose minds are by meditation and prayer rendered familiar with death: and who know, that while the grave is the receptacle of their bodies, they have for their souls an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavensⁿ — — —

^h Phil. iv. 5.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. *σχημα*.

^k 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

^l Eccl. ix. 10.

^m Ps. xc. 12.

ⁿ If this be a subject for a Funeral Sermon, the person's character may be mentioned here—Thus; "Such was the state of *him* whose loss we now deplore."

Happy they who in the view of this are cleaving unto Christ with full purpose of heart. O that we all might be like-minded, living in an habitual dependence upon Christ, and in a zealous performance of his will! Then may we look forward to our dissolution with joy, accounting death our gain^o, and placing it amongst our choicest treasures^p — — —]

2. Those who know and *disregard* it—

[This, alas! forms the greater part of every congregation; insomuch, that they who act up to this truth are gazed at “as signs and as wonders” in the world. But how will this supineness appear in a little time? We do not positively say, that you will look with regret on your present conduct on your death-bed; for many die as stupid, as ignorant, and as hardened as they lived. But we are well assured, that you will have far other thoughts of your conduct as soon as you come into the presence of your Judge — — — Let me then entreat you to “redeem the present time,” and to “work while it is day; for the night cometh wherein no man can work.”]

^o Phil. i. 21.

^p 1 Cor. iii. 22.

CCCCCLXXXI.

JOB'S COMPASSION FOR THE POOR.

Job xxx. 25. *Did not I weep for him that was in trouble?
Was not my soul grieved for the poor?*

IN the midst of any heavy calamities, a recollection that we have abused the season of prosperity must add greatly to our distress: whereas a consciousness that we have endeavoured to fulfil the duties of our station, must afford a rich consolation to the afflicted mind. It was a matter of self-congratulation to David under the persecutions that he met with from his inveterate enemies, that he had done nothing to provoke their enmity; and that, instead of retaliating their injuries even in thought or desire, he had tenderly felt for them in their troubles, and earnestly sought their welfare^a. To Job also this thought was a source of much comfort under his accumulated trials. In the passage before us he complains bitterly of his friends, and too

^a Ps. xxxv. 11—14.

rashly also concerning God. And the words of the text *may be* considered as reflecting on them for treating him otherwise than he had deserved. But we rather suppose the words were introduced as a consolatory reflection, that, though unkindly treated under his own afflictions, he could appeal to God he had conducted himself differently towards others : “ Did not I weep for him that was in trouble ? Was not my soul grieved for the poor ? ”

There are two observations naturally arising from these words, which we shall make the foundation of the following discourse :

I. The poor, when they are in trouble, are great objects of compassion—

[The poor, whilst they enjoy their health, and are under no extraordinary pressure, are quite as happy as the rich. If they have fewer comforts, they do not feel the want of them ; and they are, in a great measure, strangers to those vexations and disappointments, which are the usual attendants of wealth. They, for the most part, enjoy their homely meal with a keener appetite and relish, than they who are fed with delicacies : and, while their richer and more luxurious masters are wakeful upon beds of down, they rest in comfort on a bed of straw, and “ their sleep is sweet unto them.” If we had complete access both to the rich and poor, and could perfectly weigh the personal and domestic happiness of each, I am persuaded we should find the scale very generally turn in favour of the poor : for what they lose in respect of carnal indulgences, is more than made up to them by peace and contentment.

But when sickness comes, then the inconveniences of poverty begin to be deeply felt. The well-earned pittance which was adequate to the wants of a man and his family while in health, is utterly insufficient to procure medical assistance, and to provide those comforts which are requisite for the alleviation of pain, or the restoration of health and strength. The industrious husband finds all his exertions ineffectual ; and is reduced to the necessity of leaving his wife or child to languish without help, or of plunging himself into inextricable difficulties, by his endeavours to obtain a suitable, but uncertain, relief.

But suppose the head of the family himself to be seized with sickness ; then, with increasing wants, there comes an increased incapacity to supply them. The little stream that before nourished and refreshed the family, is cut off, and ceases to flow in its accustomed channel. What now can he do ? Perhaps it may be said “ Let him apply to his parish for relief.” True ;

but it is painful to a generous mind to become burthensome to others. He who has been accustomed to maintain his family by his own labour, does not like to become a pensioner on the bounty of others without an absolute and irresistible necessity. He knows, possibly from his own experience, that many are obliged to pay rates for the support of others, while they themselves scarcely know how to provide for their own subsistence. Hence he nobly struggles with his difficulties; and carries the conflict perhaps beyond the bounds of prudence, while from tenderness to others he forgets the regard which he should shew to himself and his own family. Conceive, then, his distress: behold him debilitated with disease, and racked with pain: behold him destitute of the remedies that might remove his disorder: see him incurring debts which it will be difficult for him ever to discharge. Perhaps at last he applies for relief: and then is told, that, while he has this or that comfort, which the industry of former years had enabled him to procure, he cannot be relieved. See him then compelled to sell first one thing, then another; thus stripping himself and family of the little comforts that remained to them; and, after all, witnessing the privations, the wants, the miseries of his benumbed and starving dependents. This is no uncommon picture: it is seen in every town, and almost in every village, through the kingdom; though, probably, less in this than in any other nation upon earth. And is not such a person an object of compassion? must not he be lost to all the feelings of humanity, who does not "weep over him, and whose soul is not grieved for him?"

Yes; we must declare to all, that,

II. To exercise compassion towards them is one of the principal duties of a Christian—

There is no duty more strongly inculcated than that of compassion to the poor: every species of argument is used in Scripture in order to enforce the observance of it. It is enforced by arguments taken,

1. From political expediency—

[God does not disdain to urge upon us such considerations as are calculated to affect even a selfish mind.

Does not every one desire to relieve himself? This we do, in fact, when we relieve the poor: for all of us are members of one body: consequently our neighbour demands the same attention from us as ourselves^b: and, in neglecting him, we "hide ourselves from our own flesh^c."

^b 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26.

^c Isai. lviii. 7.

Are we not ourselves liable to fall into adversity? No man knows what circumstances he may be brought into before he die. We have seen in our day princes and nobles subsisting upon charity, and many of them on a very slender pittance too. Would not we then, if reduced to want, desire to find compassion in the breast of others? And, if so, ought we not to exercise it ourselves^d? Methinks our charity should be extended to the utmost verge of prudence and propriety^e.

Would we desire Divine consolations under our afflictions? To be charitable to others is one way to secure them. Hear what God has said: "Blessed is the man that considereth (not slightly pitieth, but with a deep interest in their welfare *considereth*) the poor and needy: the Lord shall deliver him in the time of trouble . . . The Lord will make all his bed in his sickness^f." What greater inducement to charity would we desire, than such a hope and prospect as this?

Would we get the best possible interest for our money? There is no such bank in the universe as this. To enrich ourselves by giving away, and by giving the very "*first-fruits*, and that too of *all* our increase," may seem strange indeed: reason would say that it was the way to impoverish ourselves: but God tells us that it is the way to "fill our barns with plenty, and to make our presses burst out with new wine^g." And experience proves, that, "if we give to others, men will in our necessity give into our bosom, good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over^h."

To complete this argument—*Would we keep our wealth for ever?* This is the way to do so. They who hoard up their riches must leave them all behind themⁱ: but they who dispose of their wealth in acts of charity, carry it with them into the eternal world, where it shall be restored to them with interest^k. They lend their money to the Lord, who has pledged himself to repay them^l in full, yea, to recompense them in the resurrection of the just^m; and, provided they have acted from Christian principles, to give them eternal lifeⁿ. He has even promised to proportion their harvest to the seed they have sown^o. So that if "the children of light were as wise in their generation as the children of this world," they would, like the poor widow, and the first Christians, be ready to give their whole substance to the poor.]

^d Heb. xiii. 3.

^e Eccl. xi. 1, 2.

^f Ps. xli. 1—3. See also Isai. lviii. 10, 11. "Draw out thy *soul*," not thy purse merely.

^g Prov. xiii. 7. and iii. 9, 10.

^h Luke vi. 38.

ⁱ Luke xii. 33.

^k Luke xviii. 22.

^l Prov. xix. 17.

^m Luke xiv. 12—14.

ⁿ 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

^o 2 Cor. ix. 6.

2. From Christian necessity—

[Here the arguments are far more forcible and impressive.

The exercise of charity is imposed on us, with the authority of a law, by Christ himself. And shall we despise that law? Yea rather, when it comes to us so recommended and enjoined, shall we not labour to the uttermost to fulfil it? This is an argument urged by the great Apostle: "Bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ^p."

Our obedience to this law is the criterion whereby we must judge of our regard to Christ.—St. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to liberality, in order "to prove the sincerity of their love^q." And St. John tells us that all our professions are hypocrisy, and all our experiences a delusion, if we do not exercise this virtue^r. Would we then contentedly rest in a state, wherein all our pretensions to religion are vain? Would we proclaim to all men that we have no love to the Father or to Christ? If not, we must delight ourselves in doing good according to our ability.

Our exercise, or neglect, of charity will be the ground of the sentence that in the last day shall be passed upon us.—The Judge of quick and dead informs us, that the strictest enquiries will be made relative to this point; and that they who have not relieved him in his poor members, will be bidden to depart accursed; while they who have manifested a tender regard for the poor shall be welcomed by him as the children of his heavenly Father, and be exalted by him to the possession of his eternal kingdom^s. To the same effect he elsewhere says, "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy^t;" and St. James, on the contrary part, says, "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath shewed no mercy^u."

Weigh now these considerations, and see if they do not amount to necessity; and whether we must not say, 'Woe is unto me, if I do not cultivate a compassionate and liberal spirit!']

TO CONCLUDE—

[We have inculcated the necessity of liberality and compassion. But let us not be misunderstood; alms-giving does *not* make us Christians; *but only proves* us so. Nor does it prove us Christians, unless it arise from Christian principles. It is faith in Christ that *makes* us his: and obedience to his will *proves* us to be his.

But we must further guard the subject from mistake. It is *not* a transient emotion, or a *falling tear*, that will suffice, (for many will shed a tear at a moving tale, who have no

^p Gal. vi. 2.

^s Matt. xxv. 34—46.

^q 2 Cor. viii. 8.

^t Matt. v. 7.

^r 1 John iii. 17.

^u Jam. ii. 13.

principle of love in their hearts); but "*our souls must be grieved*" for the poor: we must lay to heart their wants and miseries, and make it our study and delight to administer to their relief^x.

Let not any then be contented with approving the things which they have heard, or with wishing well to the institution that has been recommended to their care: for St. James justly says, "If ye merely say to a brother or sister, Be ye warmed, be ye filled; and yet neglect to give them the things they need: what doth it profit?" Such compassion will neither profit them nor you. Let such of you then as profess yourselves "the elect of God, put on bowels of mercies^y:" yea, let all of us stir up within our own breasts a tender concern for the welfare of our fellow-creatures; and so act now, that on our dying bed we may appeal to God himself, "Did I not weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?"

^x Here the particular institution, or occasion, may be mentioned; and the usefulness of the particular charity insisted on.

^y Jam. ii. 15, 16.

^z Col. iii. 12.

CCCCLXXXII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARING FOR OUR GREAT ACCOUNT.

Job xxxi. 14. *What shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?*

THE testimony of a good conscience is a source of rich consolation at all times, but more especially when we are suffering under afflictions from God, or calumnies from man. Job, in the midst of all his troubles, was upheld by it, when, without such a support, he must have inevitably sunk under his accumulated burthens. It must be confessed, indeed, that this holy man, when urged and irritated by his uncharitable friends, expressed himself too strongly upon this subject: yet we cannot fail of seeing throughout his whole history, that his conscious integrity enabled him to hold fast by God, and to wait with patience the issue of his unexpected calamities.

In the passage before us he is specifying many things commonly practised by others, but from which

he had been preserved pure. Among these he mentions his conduct to his servants; and observes that, if in this he had been arbitrary and oppressive, he would have a melancholy account indeed to give in the day of judgment; "*Then,*" says he, "What shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?"

These words may be considered as,

I. A weighty reflection—

Job is contemplating his responsibility to God, together with the impartiality that will be shewn in the future judgment—

[In speaking of his accountableness to God, he does not limit it to such actions as are reprobated among men, but mentions it in reference to (what is generally but little regarded) his spirit and temper in domestic duties. He well knew that God took cognizance of small things as well as great, and of things relating to civil and social life as well as those that pertain more immediately to religion. He was certain also, that at God's tribunal the slave and his master, the beggar and the king, would have their cause determined with equal and unerring justice. Hence, when calumniated and condemned by men, he naturally reflects on the sentence that would be passed upon him at God's tribunal, on the supposition that there were any wilful and allowed sin found in him, whatever the nature of that sin might be, and however venial it might be deemed by the world at large.]

Such a reflection will be highly profitable to us also—

[For great and heinous sins, as they are called, we all feel ourselves accountable to God; but we scarcely think that any responsibility attaches to the dispositions we manifest in the family or the state; we may be querulous and contentious subjects, or proud and oppressive masters, or slothful and impertinent servants, and yet never imagine that God will notice such faults in the day of judgment. The rich and the great are ready to think, that they shall find some favour with God on account of their earthly distinctions; and that, while a poor man who robs or injures them is deserving of the heaviest judgments, they may rob and injure others to ever so great an amount by their extravagance or extortion, and yet pass without censure. But the great and terrible God has no

respect of persons^a, but will “judge every man according to his works.” And it will be well for us, if we take a retrospect of our actions, and *seriously reflect*, what answer we shall give to God in the day that he shall visit us.]

But these words may also properly suggest to us,

II. An instructive inquiry—

The inquiry is twofold: if God should call us to his judgment-seat before we have truly repented of our sins,

1. What shall we “do?”

[Shall we go before him with boldness, as too many rush into his presence now? Will not his purity abash us, and his excellency make us afraid^b?]

Shall we hide ourselves from his presence, and elude his search? Whither shall we flee in order to effect this^c? In vain shall we, “call upon the rocks to fall upon us, or the hills to cover us.”

Shall we resist his summons? How vain the attempt! “Shall our hands be strong in the day that he shall deal with us^d,” or, “can we thunder with a voice like his^e?”

Let us then bethink ourselves “what we shall *do* in the day of visitation? to whom shall we flee for help? and where shall we leave our glory^f?”]

2. What shall we “answer?”

[Shall we say with that amiable, but mistaken, youth, “I have kept all thy commandments^g?” Alas! which of the commandments have we not broken times without number? Let it only be considered that an angry word is murder^h, and an unchaste look adulteryⁱ; and we shall find abundant reason, even as holy Job himself did^k, to blush and be confounded before the heart-searching God^l.

If this appear too presumptuous, shall we, like the Pharisee, tell him of our comparative goodness^m? Suppose we do differ from others, what ground of glorying is this to usⁿ? And how infinitely short have we come of the perfection which God requires of us! Yea, the very disposition to justify ourselves is sufficient to make God utterly abhor us^o.

Shall we answer, that we had other things beside religion to attend to? But what other things? If they were lawful

^a Deut. x. 17.

^b Job xiii. 11.

^c Ps. cxxxix. 7—12.

^d Ezek. xxii. 14.

^e Job xl. 9.

^f Isai. x. 3.

^g Matt. xix. 20.

^h Matt. v. 21, 22.

ⁱ Matt. v. 28.

^k Job ix. 20.

^l Job ix. 2, 3.

^m Luke xviii. 11, 12.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^o Job ix. 30—32. Luke xviii. 14.

in themselves, they were not in the least degree incompatible with religion: and if they were unlawful, they ought to have been renounced.

Shall we reply, that we did not think God would ever condemn any one for the want of religion? But why did we entertain so fond a hope? Were we not sufficiently warned to the contrary? Was it possible for God to declare in more express terms his determination to punish impenitent transgressors?

Whatever other answers we may be disposed to make, let us consider whether they do not admit of a reply that shall stop our mouths, and utterly confound us? In this way we shall gather instruction for which we may have reason to bless God for ever.]

The oblique hints which both Job and his friends repeatedly gave to each other, may lead us further to consider the words, as,

III. A solemn warning—

If a master's unkindness to his servant would bring down upon him the divine judgments, Job's friends might see, that their uncharitableness towards him would not pass unnoticed. In the same manner, these questions convey a solemn warning,

1. To those who are altogether regardless of religion—

[We are well aware that when a fellow-creature expostulates with such persons, they will fill their mouths with arguments, and turn to ridicule "the words of truth and soberness." But it is not a worm like themselves that they must answer, but the living God. Let careless sinners then consider what they shall answer HIM? And, before they speak peace to themselves, let them think whether HE will deem their excuses sufficient? It is by *his* judgment that they must stand or fall; and therefore they must be satisfied with nothing which will not satisfy *him*. It will be to but little purpose to be justified in their own eyes, and in the opinions of a partial world; for if *he* should refuse his sanction, they will have nothing left but to bewail their folly in everlasting torments.]

2. To those who rest in an outward and formal religion—

[It is not the observance of forms, but the devotion of the heart, that God requires. Religion is to be our business, yea, our very element wherein we live. Our daily care, and our supreme delight, must be to maintain fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and to glorify God by a holy conversation. These are the things which God will inquire into at the last day: and if we tell him then, that such a life was generally reprobated as hypocrisy or enthusiasm, will he account it a sufficient excuse for our conduct? What! he may say, were all the prophets, and apostles, yea, and my only dear Son, too, hypocrites and fanatics? And were others to be condemned in proportion as they resembled these divine patterns? Did you not know in your consciences, even while you ridiculed the godly, that both you, and they, *ought* to walk as Christ walked?

Know, then, that the form of godliness, however exemplary, will, if destitute of the life and power of it, leave you without excuse in the day of judgment.]

3. To those who profess religion indeed, but walk unworthy of it—

[Every question put to careless or formal Christians will have tenfold force when addressed to those who profess godliness: for they acknowledge their obligation to piety, and seek to be esteemed as truly religious characters; and therefore to all their other guilt they add the basest hypocrisy, if they live in any wilful sin. Let those (if such there be amongst us) who, while they “seem to be religious, either bridle not their tongue^q,” or yield to the solicitations of wrath, envy, malice, lewdness, covetousness, or any other vile affection; let them, I say, consider what *they* shall answer when God shall visit them. If others be punished, much more shall *they*^r: yea, their condemnation shall be increased in proportion to the mercies they have slighted, and the advantages they have abused.]

We cannot conclude without adding one word of

DIRECTION—

[It has been shewn already, what answers will *not* suffice at the day of judgment. It is but reasonable then to ask, What answer *will* suffice? To solve this important question, we reply, That doubtless we must renounce all habitual and allowed sin: but that, with respect to the sins of infirmity that are incident to our fallen nature, we should lie low before God^s, seeking mercy through Christ only, and declaring our

^q Jam. i. 26.

^r Amos iii. 2. Isai. xxxiii. 14.

^s Job xl. 4, 5. and ix. 15.

affiance in the promises which God has given us in his word^t. Then, though vile, we shall not be cast out; nor shall our past sins be remembered against us any more for ever^u.]

^t Isai. xliii. 25, 26. See this very question, "What shall we do?" and the answer given to it by the voice of inspiration, Acts ii. 37, 38. and xvi. 30, 31.

^u Heb. viii. 12.

CCCCLXXXIII.

SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY.

Job xxxi. 24, 25, 28. *If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; . . . This also were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge: for I should have denied the God that is above.*

HATEFUL as boasting is, and justly condemned both by God and man, there are occasions when it is proper, and indeed necessary. For instance; when a character has been grossly calumniated, and can be vindicated only by an appeal to facts, those facts may be adduced, however much the recital of them may tend to proclaim our own praise. Samuel was constrained to assert the equity of his own administration, when the people cast reflections on him, by desiring to change the form of his government, and to have a king substituted in his place. Paul also, when traduced by persons who sought to destroy his influence in the Church, declared, though much against his will, the honours which had been conferred upon him, and the habits he had invariably maintained^a. Indeed, we should have known comparatively but little of this blessed Apostle, if he had not been compelled by the malevolence of others to make known the hidden principles by which he had been actuated, and the blameless conduct which he had uniformly pursued: and, so far from blaming him for his boasting, we cannot but be thankful that

^a 2 Cor. xii. 1—11.

God suffered him to be so injured, and thereby constrained him in self-defence to make known to us so much of his true character. In like manner we account it a great benefit to the Church, that Job was driven by the heavy accusations that were brought against him, to insist so largely on his own innocence, and to declare so fully the habits and exercises of his former life. Throughout this whole chapter he maintains, in reference to the evils that were laid to his charge, that his conduct had been the very reverse of what his friends supposed. Had he done this in the spirit of the self-applauding Pharisee (Luke xviii.), he had acted wrong: but when it was necessary to wipe off the aspersions that were so injuriously cast upon him, he was justified in adducing whatever had a tendency to place his character in its true light.

The part we have just read is a vindication of himself from idolatry. Of idolatry there are two kinds; one actual and manifest; the other virtual and constructive. The actual idolatry is that which is referred to in the verses we have omitted. In the days of Job, or at least in the country where he lived, the sun and moon were the only objects to which idolatrous worship was paid: and, as they were out of the reach of the worshippers, the kiss, which was afterwards given to idols as an expression of supreme regard, was transferred to them by means of the hand^b. But Job declared, that he had never been guilty of this great impiety. Nay more, he had never, even in heart, given to the creature any portion of that respect which was due only to the Most High God: and if he had, he acknowledged that his sufferings were richly merited, and that as his conduct would have been in fact a denial of his God, he could expect nothing from God but wrath and indignation to all eternity.

I. The disposition here specified—

An undue regard to wealth is extremely common in the world—

^b Hos. xiii. 2.

[The possession of wealth is no evil: it then only becomes an evil, when it is accompanied with a measure of affiance or delight in it. But, fallen and depraved as man by nature is, it is exceeding difficult to view wealth with such indifference as we ought. Our blessed Lord states this, when speaking of the Rich Youth, who renounced and forsook him, rather than part with his great possessions. He first said, "How hardly shall they that *have* riches, enter into the kingdom of God!" and then, "How hardly shall they that *trust in* riches enter into the kingdom of God!" intending thereby to intimate, that it is almost "impossible" to have them, and not to trust in them^c. The pleasure that men take in the contemplation of their wealth, whether inherited or acquired, arises from the thought, that they are thereby placed, if not entirely, yet in some measure, beyond the reach of evil; and that, in whatever circumstances they may be, they shall have something which will administer to their comfort^d. But this is idolatry, as we shall shew under our Second Head. At present, we content ourselves with observing, that this is the view, which all natural men have of wealth, and the regard which, under all circumstances, they pay to it.

Whence is it that men are so eager in the pursuit of wealth? Whence is it that they so earnestly desire it for their children? Whence is it that all who come to the possession of wealth, or to any great preferment, are congratulated by their friends, and receive those congratulations as suitable to the occasion? Whence is it, on the contrary, that any heavy losses are considered as so great a misfortune, and call forth either real sympathy, or compliments of condolence? Is not all this from a presumption, that wealth and preferment are *in themselves* a certain and a positive good? Does it not all imply a hope or confidence in gold? Would a man who had merely scraped together a great heap of dust, rejoice because his hand had gotten much? and does not the satisfaction he feels from the attainment of riches, shew, that he has formed an erroneous estimate of their value? — — —]

Such then being the disposition specified in our text, we proceed to point out,

II. The sinfulness of it—

To act in any way unworthy of God is to deny him^e: but to feel such a disposition towards wealth as has been now described, is in a more especial manner to be regarded in this view. It denies, in fact,

^e Mark x. 21—27.

^d Hab. ii. 9.

^c Tit. i. 16.

1. That God is the *only* source of happiness to man—

[God has called himself “the Fountain of living waters,” and has pronounced all creatures to be “broken cisterns that will hold no water.” Now what is this but a declaration, that to make us happy is his exclusive prerogative? Doubtless the creature, when he accompanies it with his blessing, is a source of much comfort: but it has nothing in itself: the sun, whose genial warmth is such a fruitful source of blessings to some, destroys all the hopes of others, and burns up the very face of the earth. The moon, which gladdens the heart of many a benighted traveller, operates by a secret influence upon the brain, to strike some with madness. Thus wealth also, which to some is the means of exercising a most diffusive benevolence, to others is a curse. What was Nabal the better for his wealth? It only fostered his deep-rooted churlishness, and ultimately proved the occasion of his death. In a word, the creature is nothing but what God is pleased to make it: with his blessing, it will contribute to our happiness; but without his blessing, it is only “vanity and vexation of spirit.” If then we place any confidence in it, or suffer it to be a source of complacency to our minds, we ascribe to the creature what is found in none but the Lord Jehovah; to whom alone we should have respect, when we say, “Return unto *thy* rest, O my soul.”]

2. That he is *all-sufficient* for that end—

[The man that can look up to a reconciled God in Christ Jesus, has all that he can desire: the wealth of the whole world can add nothing to him. If it be thought that wealth being an *addition*, must of necessity enlarge the comforts of the soul; we would ask, What can a taper *add* to the light of the meridian sun? or who that enjoys the full splendour of that heavenly orb, does not despise the feeble efforts of a taper to augment its lustre? So it is with him who beholds the light of God’s glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ: the creature, whoever, or whatever it may be, “has no glory in his eyes by reason of the glory that excelleth.” Did the prodigal any longer affect the husks which the swine ate of, when he was feeding on the fatted calf in his father’s house? No, surely: nor does *he* ever hunger, who has fed on Jesu’s flesh; or thirst, when once he has been refreshed with the water of life — — — Hear the testimony of one who spoke from his own experience: “We are sorrowful,” says the blessed Apostle, “yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing all things[†].”

[†] 2 Cor. vi. 10.

Now if we desire any earthly good from an idea that it can *of itself* contribute to our happiness, we virtually deny the all-sufficiency of Christ; and by exalting the creature to a participation of his rights, we rob him of his unalienable and incommunicable glory.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. For reproof—

[Let this character of Job be compared with that of the generality of Christians, and it will afford abundant matter for the deepest humiliation. Certainly, on account of our superior advantages, we ought to possess far greater spirituality of mind than Job: yet how far below him do the generality even of those who profess religion fall! Perhaps the besetting sin of those who embrace the Gospel is worldliness: it is certain, that very many of them are as eager in the pursuit of wealth as others: and this accounts for the little influence of the word of God upon them: the seed is good, but the soil is bad; and the noxious weeds, by their speedy and incessant growth, keep down the feebler plants of piety in the soul: “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.” And here let it be observed, that it is *not the overt act* of covetousness or creature-dependence that is condemned, but *the inward disposition* of the soul: even the complacency of mind that arises from the possession of wealth is itself a positive “denial of the God that is above.” O, Brethren, enter into your own bosoms, and judge yourselves in relation to this matter. Inquire whether God has such a full possession of your hearts as to render all earthly things vain, empty, and worthless, in your estimation? if not, how can you call God your portion, or imagine that you have formed a proper estimate of the blessings of salvation? Know assuredly, that, if you have just views of Christ, you will regard him as the pearl of great price, “to purchase which a wise merchant will sell all that he has;” and you will say from your inmost soul, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee.”

2. For instruction in righteousness—

[We learn from our text, wherein a true confession of Christ consists: it is not in an assent to some particular truths, but in a practical and experimental sense of his love overpowering all inferior considerations. To love the Lord Jesus Christ, to “cleave to him with full purpose of heart,” to count him “all our salvation and all our desire,” this is what God requires; this is also what our blessed Saviour merits at our

hands; and if we despise not even life itself when standing in competition with his will, his presence, his glory, we shall be regarded as denying him, and must expect to be denied by him in the presence of his Father and his holy angels^s. In the Church above "there is no need of either sun or moon to lighten it, because the Lamb is the light thereof^h;" so also is it in the Church below, wherever Christ has really established his kingdom in the heartⁱ. Look to it then, Brethren, that it be thus with you: and, if you are disposed to ask, "Who will shew me any good?" learn immediately to add, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me; and that shall put more gladness in my heart, than any increase of corn or wine or oil can ever do^k:" for as, on the one hand, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth," so, on the other hand, "In God's favour is life, and his loving-kindness is better than life itself."

^s Mark viii. 34, 35, 38.^h Rev. xxi. 23.ⁱ Isai. xxiv. 23.^k Ps. iv. 6, 7.

CCCCCLXXXIV.

THE BENEFIT OF VISITING THE SICK.

Job xxxiii. 23, 24. *If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness; then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom.*

ELIHU was not one of the particular friends of Job. He was a young man, who, on the occasion of Job's friends assembling together, had been admitted to hear rather than to speak. But when he had heard the repeated attempts of Job's friends to convince him of sin, and their incapacity to answer the arguments which Job had adduced, his spirit was stirred in him, and he determined to offer his opinion^a. He was of a better spirit than Job's friends, and had a deeper insight into the dispensations of God's providence. He never accused Job of hypocrisy, as they had done; but he saw wherein he had erred, and endeavoured with fidelity to point it out to him. Job had certainly erred in two respects; in speaking too highly of himself, and too disrespectfully of God.

^a Job xxxii. 6—10.

To bring home to him these two faults, Elihu shews him, what he evidently was not sufficiently acquainted with, the ends and designs of God in afflicting man; namely, to humble him, and to prepare him for those richer mercies which he has in reserve for every true penitent. There were various means whereby God prepared men for the knowledge of himself, and the enjoyment of his glory: one was by secret discoveries of himself in dreams and visions: another was by laying them on a bed of affliction, and sending some well-informed servant to instruct them. It is of this latter mode that Elihu speaks in the words before us: from which we are naturally led to shew you,

I. The office of those who visit the sick—

A person who in a spirit of love visits the chambers of the sick, is “a messenger” from the Most High God, and “an interpreter” of his holy will: and one who delights in that office, and is duly qualified for the performance of it, is indeed a rare and valuable character, justly styled “One among a thousand.” The object which such a person should bear in view is briefly stated in our text; it is “to shew unto man his uprightness.”

But *whose* uprightness is here intended? *the man's own?* Most assuredly not. Such a visitor as this would be neither rare nor valuable. It is the common language of ignorant persons when visiting a dying friend, to say, “You have nothing to fear: you have been *upright* and honest in the world: you have fulfilled all your duties in life: and there is no doubt but that you are accepted of God.” Such a visitor as this is indeed “a messenger;” but it is “a messenger of Satan,” to beguile and ruin an immortal soul. For what is such language as this, but to “speak peace where there is no peace,” or, as the prophet strongly expresses it, to “sew pillows to the arm-holes” of one that ought to be awakened from his delusions, and to “daub with untempered mortar a wall that is just ready to fall^b?”

^b Ezek. xiii. 10, 11, 18.

The uprightness that is to be pointed out, is *God's*. But here we acknowledge, that the *precise* import of the passage is not easy to be determined. Various are the senses which commentators have affixed to the word: but, if we would obtain just views of the Scripture, we must not consider so much what sense any word will bear, as what agrees best with the context. Now we apprehend that the context duly attended to, will give us the exact meaning of this expression. Let us see what was the object which Elihu had in view. He considered Job as faulty in two respects; first, in maintaining his own righteousness; and next, in complaining of God as harsh and unjust towards him^c. "*In this,*" says he to Job, "*thou art not just.*" To counteract these two errors; he tells Job, that God had afflicted him on purpose to lead him to juster views both of himself and of his God: and *that he himself was sent as "a messenger and interpreter" to him, "one among a thousand," to expound this matter to him; and to shew him "God's uprightness, or righteousness," first, in punishing his sin; and, next, in the way provided by him for the pardon of it.*

The visitor's office then is, to shew the righteousness of God,

1. In punishing sin—

[It is common for persons in affliction, especially if their afflictions be heavy, complicated, and of long continuance, to manifest an impatient spirit, and to account their trials severe. But every thought of this kind shews how regardless they are of the hand from whence their trials proceed, and of their own extreme demerit, which, if justly viewed, would reconcile them to any dispensation which Almighty God might send. The invariable language of those who are truly humbled is, "Thou, Lord, hast punished me far less than my iniquities deserve:" "Thou art righteous in all that is come upon me:" "to thee belongeth righteousness; but unto me belongeth shame and confusion of face^d." This truth had been before inculcated by Zophar^e; and it is of great importance to be inculcated on all: for, "shall a living man complain? a man for the punishment

^c ver. 8—12. ^d See Ezra ix. 13. Neh. ix. 33. Dan. ix. 7, 8.

^e Job xi. 6.

of his sins'?" No: he must be brought to "accept the punishment of his iniquity," and to say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him^f." There must be no "replying against God:" "the clay must not contend with the potter:" the frame to which every sufferer must be brought is this; "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good:" and it is a very important part of a visitor's office to bring him to it, by shewing, that any thing short of "everlasting burnings" is a *mercy* for which we have reason to be *thankful*, and not a *judgment* of which we have any reason to complain; since it is light in comparison of what we deserve, and is sent on purpose to keep us from ever suffering our full desert.]

2. In his way of pardoning sin—

[This, we confess, appears at first sight a forced construction of the passage: but, on a nearer inspection of it, we shall see reason to believe, that it is indeed the true import. The uprightness of God in *punishing* sin seems undoubtedly the *first and leading sense*; but it must *include* a view of the way of salvation through the ransom paid for sinners, or else the immediate acceptance of the sinner through that ransom could not follow from it. In this view of the word "uprightness," or "righteousness," there is a striking coincidence between the text and a passage in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans; where the Apostle again and again mentions "the righteousness which is of God by faith," and represents Christ as "set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare God's *righteousness* for, or in, the remission of sins; to declare, I say, his *righteousness*, that he might be just, and yet the *Justifier* of him which believeth in Jesus^h." Now on what occasion can it be so necessary to "shew a man this," as when he is in sick and dying circumstances, and speedily about to enter into the immediate presence of his God? Then in particular he is anxious to inquire, "What must I do to be saved?" and then must we return him the same answer as the Apostle did to the jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be savedⁱ."

This, then, is the special office of those who visit the sick; namely, to declare freely and fully the way of salvation through a crucified Redeemer. They should act in the chambers of the sick precisely as Moses did in the camp of Israel, when thousands were dying of the wounds inflicted by the fiery flying serpents: they should erect in the sight of the dying penitent the brazen serpent, and say, "Look unto it and be

^f Lam. iii. 39.

^h Rom. iii. 21, 22, 25, 26.

^g Mic. vii. 9.

ⁱ Acts xvi. 30, 31.

ye saved, all the ends of the earth^k!" They should encourage the afflicted soul to look unto Christ even "at the eleventh hour;" and to declare plainly, that "all who believe in him are justified from all things^l." Then indeed will they approve themselves faithful "messengers" from God, and just "interpreters" of his mind and will: and every messenger is of inestimable value, and fitly called, "One among a thousand."]

Such being the blessed office of a visitor, let us contemplate,

II. The benefit arising from a faithful discharge of it—

Doubtless in many instances, little, if any, good arises from efforts made in the chambers of the sick: and often the hopeful appearances that begin there, vanish speedily, "as the early dew, or as the morning cloud." But in many instances the labours of visitors are productive of the greatest good;

1. Even to the bodies of men—

[We speak not now of pecuniary relief, and of its effects on the recovery of many from their disorders, (though we ought not by any means to lose sight of that;) it is solely of the spiritual office of the visitor that we speak; and we affirm, that the bodies of men often derive incalculable benefit from it. Of disorders, some purely belong to the body; and others are greatly influenced by the mind, or perhaps originate altogether from it. Now, in reference to the former of these, it is certain, that spiritual instruction will not operate as a charm upon the body: but if, under the pressure of temporal affliction, the mind be disquieted by impatience and fretfulness, those agitations will have a very unfavourable aspect on the body: and will greatly impede the cure of the disorder; and consequently, the composure of the mind, the bringing of it to a state of resignation and submission, and particularly to a state of peace with God, will exceedingly promote the recovery of the body; so true is it that "A merry heart doth good like a medicine^m." But if, as in the latter case, the disorder is very intimately connected with the mind, and (how many nervous disorders arise from the pressure of worldly troubles!) it is obvious, that the spiritual physician may be more useful than a medical

^k Compare Isai. xlv. 22. with John iii. 14, 15.

^l Acts xiii. 39.

^m It sometimes happens, that the life of a person is actually preserved, *solely*, under God, by the composure of the mind. A most remarkable instance of this the author has in his own parish.

attendant; since by administering "the balm of Gilead" to the soul, he applies his remedy to the root of the disorder, and gains access to that which no earthly prescription can reach. And more especially if, as sometimes happens, the health has declined through apprehensions of God's wrath, and the influence of desponding fears, the free and full exhibition of God's mercy in Christ Jesus is the *only* remedy that is at all suited to the case; and the restoration of peace to the soul is, in fact, "health to the navel, and marrow to the bonesⁿ." "A faithful ambassador," says Solomon, "is health^o."]

2. More especially to their souls—

[How many are there who never began to think of their souls, till they were visited with sickness, or brought down by some heavy affliction! "Before they were afflicted they went astray:" but God having sent to them some kind messenger, some able interpreter, has led them by his means to a consideration of their state, and to a true and saving repentance. No man has ever executed with fidelity the office of which we are speaking, without having seen some fruit of his labour: and we will venture to appeal to such persons, (for *they* are the *only* competent judges,) whether they have not been sometimes eye-witnesses of the very scene described in our text? Have they not seen the afflicted soul comforted; and peace abounding in the conscience that was recently overwhelmed with desponding fears? Has not God said, as it were, in their very presence, "Deliver that drooping sinner from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom?" And have they not seen the person, who but just before dared not to lift up his eyes unto heaven, "praying unto God" and made sensible "of his favour," and "beholding the face of his reconciled God with joy^p?" Yes; this is no uncommon sight: and whoever will lend himself diligently to this good work, shall have the happiness of dispensing these blessings, and of having some poor sinners to be his joy and crown of rejoicing in the day of judgment.]

REFLECTIONS—

1. How honourable an office is that of a visitor of the sick!

[This office, though highly proper to be executed by ministers, ought by no means to be confined to them. True, such a person, duly qualified and thoroughly in earnest, is "One among a thousand:" but it were better, if possible, that there should be ten or twenty such amongst a thousand: and

ⁿ Prov. iii. 8.

^o Prov. xiii. 17.

^p ver. 26.

most assuredly it is the duty of every one, according to his ability and opportunities, to engage in it; since the execution of it is a very principal fruit and evidence of "pure and undefiled religion¹." We would call on all, therefore, in their respective stations, to consider how they may execute this office to the utmost possible advantage. And let all know, for their encouragement, that if they receive not honour from their fellow-creatures for these self-denying exertions, they shall certainly ere long be honoured and rewarded by their God².]

2. How blind are they who are averse to have such pious instructors introduced to their sick and dying friends!

[There exists in the minds of many an idea, that religious conversation will prove injurious to a person on a bed of sickness; and that, by the anxiety that it will create, it will retard, rather than accelerate, a restoration to health. Now, if in any instance this should be the case, it may justly be said, that some risk of injury to the body would be but a small sacrifice for the obtaining of spiritual instruction under such circumstances: for, who can reflect on a soul perishing in ignorance and sin, and not see the indispensable necessity of plucking it as a brand out of the burning, ere yet it be gone beyond a hope of recovery? Methinks, if a certainty of some injury to the bodily health were put in the scale against the near and almost certain prospect of dying in an unconverted state, there can be no doubt which should preponderate: no man that knows the value of an immortal soul, can hesitate which alternative to choose. But such cases, if they exist at all, are very rare: the mind of an ungodly man is not so easily moved; nor are the emotions that may be excited so injurious as worldly vexation or worldly care: they do not prey upon the mind, as carnal feelings do. Religious feelings, even where they are not altogether of the best kind, have rather a tendency to compose the mind; inasmuch as they generate a hope in God, and open prospects of progressive improvement and of ultimate salvation. But we will not rest this matter upon the dictates either of reason or experience: God himself shall determine it: and he says, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him³." Doubtless it is expedient for the visitor to consult the weakness of the patient: but it is the height of cruelty to deny to those who are going into the presence of their God, the means of obtaining that wedding-garment that can alone make them acceptable guests at the marriage-supper of the Lamb.]

¹ Jam. i. 27.

² Matt. xxv. 35, 36.

³ Jam. v. 13.

3. How desirable is it to support such a society as this!

[— — —[†] But how can they execute their functions, if not aided by pecuniary contributions? The poor, if some relief can be afforded them in their sickness, will *on that account* welcome the Visitor as “a Messenger” from heaven: and, having received him as “a Messenger,” they will be disposed to listen to him as “an Interpreter.” It cannot be supposed, that the Visitors can effect much in this way from their own individual resources: it must be through the liberality of the public alone that this plan can be executed to any great extent. Let the hearts of all, then, be open on this occasion. If we pleaded only for the *temporal* relief of our poorer brethren in a time of sickness, we should feel that we had a claim upon your charity: but the *temporal* relief is of small importance when compared with that which we contemplate, *the instruction and salvation of the soul*. Bear this in mind; and let your contributions shew in what light you appreciate an immortal soul. Multitudes who would otherwise die in ignorance and sin may by these means be rescued from perdition: and, if our blessed Lord came down from heaven to “ransom” them by his own blood, let it be a light matter in your eyes to contribute liberally of your substance for the purpose of making known to them that “ransom,” and thereby “delivering them from going down to the pit.”]

[†] Here state the nature and plan of the Society.

CCCCLXXXV.

THE NATURE AND EFFICACY OF REPENTANCE.

Job xxxiii. 27, 28. *He looketh upon men; and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.*

GOD is often pleased to make use of affliction as the means of bringing persons to a right mind: and where he has sent any affliction as a chastisement for some particular sin, it is probable that on our repentance he will remove the chastisement*. But we must not always associate the ideas of affliction and punishment, or of repentance and recovery, so

* Jam. v. 14, 15.

as to conclude every person wicked in proportion to the calamities that may come upon him. This was the error which occasioned the whole controversy between Job and his friends. They conceived, that, by visiting him with such accumulated afflictions, God designed to point him out as a hypocrite: and, upon that presumption, they exhorted him to repent, and assured him that on his repentance God would restore to him his former health and prosperity. In support of their argument they spoke many valuable truths; but they erred in the extent to which they carried those truths, and in the application which they made of them to the case of Job. The fact is, that "no man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before him: all things come alike to all^b:" and the inequalities which we observe in the dispensations of Providence will all be rectified in the day of judgment, which is on that very account denominated, "The day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God^c." We shall therefore drop that which we apprehend to be the primary meaning of these words, because *in that sense* they are not true to the extent that Elihu designed them. We doubt not but that the most righteous persons may be reduced by sickness, and that the most penitent persons may have their sickness continued unto death. Fully persuaded of this, we shall not insist upon our text in reference to bodily sickness and recovery, but simply in reference to the concerns of the soul. In this view of the words, they point out to us,

I. The nature of repentance—

Few consider properly the nature of repentance. It does not consist in a mere acknowledgment that we are sinners, or in a dread of the consequences of our sin; but in a deep and humbling view of sin,

1. As unreasonable—

[The law of God is right^d; it is "holy, and just, and good^e." And whoever views its requisitions with an impartial

^b Eccl. ix. 1, 2.

^d Ps. xix. 7, 8.

^c Rom. ii. 5.

^e Rom. vii. 12.

eye, must of necessity confess them to be most highly reasonable. Who can doubt one moment the reasonableness of the creature serving his Creator; or of the sinner feeling gratitude to his Redeemer? Who does not see the propriety of having the bodily appetites in subjection to the nobler faculties of reason and conscience; and of governing our lives in reference to eternity, rather than to the poor vanities of time and sense? The most ignorant and most prejudiced person cannot but acknowledge that these things are "*right*."

Now what is the life of the generality, but a direct opposition to all this, or, in other words, "a perversion of that which is right?" We speak not now concerning gross sins, but concerning that kind of life which even the most moral and decent live: they forget their God; they disregard their Saviour; they live as if they thought the salvation of their souls a matter of only secondary importance.

A penitent, when he comes to a just sense of his condition, views things in this light: he is ready to exclaim with Agur, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man^f." He is amazed that God should have borne with him so long in the midst of his perverseness: and there are no terms too humiliating for him to adopt, in order to express his shame and self-abhorrence before God.]

2. As unprofitable—

[All expect that sin will profit them in some respect or other; and the gratifications purchased by it are considered as more than an equivalent for any consequences that may ensue from it.

This delusion often lasts for a considerable time: but, when a person begins to turn unto God, the scales fall from his eyes; he sees, that if he had gained the whole world, it would have been an unprofitable bargain for his immortal soul. He feels himself much in the state that our first parents were after their fall. What Satan had promised them was indeed true in some sense: "their eyes were opened; and they did discern good and evil;" but it was *good* which they had *lost*, and *evil* which they had *incurred*. Ah! how unprofitable did their sin now appear! for one taste of the forbidden fruit to sacrifice their innocence and the favour of their God! If we contemplate their feelings when they were driven out of Paradise, we shall form some idea of what a penitent feels, when once he comes to a just apprehension of his state. His *folly* appears to him even greater than his *guilt*. He now begins to understand those words, "*Madness* is in their hearts while they live^g:" and he feels the full force of that pointed interrogation,

^f Prov. xxx. 2.

^g Eccl. ix. 3.

"What fruit had ye then of those things whereof ye are now ashamed^h?"

That we may not be discouraged by this view of repentance, let us contemplate,

II. The benefits of it—

We have before assigned our reasons for declining to notice our text in reference to a recovery from bodily sickness: on that subject we could promise you nothing with any certainty: but in reference to spiritual benefits, we do not hesitate to promise you,

1. Deliverance from condemnation—

[Besides "the pit" of the grave, there is also a pit into which sinners must be cast, even "the bottomless pit," the miserable abode of Satan and his angels^l. Into that pit your soul shall never come. The impenitent alone shall have their portion there. The word and oath of Jehovah are pledged to rescue you from thence. "He has found a ransom^k:" the ransom has been paid: and God (if we may so speak) would violate his engagements with his Son, if he were to spurn from his footstool one who came to him in the name of Jesus^l. But you need not be afraid; for this is his own gracious declaration: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness^m:" and again, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercyⁿ."

Perhaps from a retrospect of your past lives you may be led to fear that you have sinned beyond the reach of mercy: but there is no ground for despondency, even to the vilest of mankind: the blood of Christ is sufficient to cleanse from all sin, however heinous^o; and the promises of acceptance through him are so extensive as to preclude all possibility of doubt to those who humbly rely upon them^p.]

2. Exaltation to glory—

The light of God's reconciled countenance shall certainly be enjoyed by the penitent *in this world*; "his light shall rise in obscurity, and his darkness shall become as the noon-day." But who can conceive of that "light" which he shall enjoy in the world to come? The highest joys which the soul can experience here, are no more in comparison of heaven, than a taper is of the meridian sun. *There* "the sun shall not be

^h Rom. vii. 21.

^l Rom. iii. 26.

^o 1 John i. 7.

^l Rev. xx. 1—3.

^m 1 John i. 9.

^p Isai. i. 18. John vi. 37.

^k ver. 24.

ⁿ Prov. xxviii. 13.

our light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto us; but the Lord shall be to us an everlasting light, and our God our glory. Our sun shall no more go down, neither shall our moon withdraw itself; but the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended^q." There may be many dark nights, and tremendous storms, before we arrive at the full consummation of our happiness: but the word is sure, that "if we sow in tears we shall reap in joy^r."]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. What encouragement we have to repent—

[God represents himself in the text as "looking upon men:" he is looking continually to see if he can find an object towards whom he can exercise mercy consistently with the honour of his other perfections. The father, in the parable, is described as looking out, as it were, with an ardent desire for the return of his prodigal son, and as running towards him as soon as ever he beheld him a great way off. This gives us a just idea of the tender compassions of our God, who "willeth not the death of any sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live." We have a still livelier representation of this in the Prophet Jeremiah^s— — —: and we may with great propriety conceive of God as looking wishfully upon us at this moment, and saying, "O that they would hearken unto my voice!" "Wilt thou not be made clean? When shall it once be?" Be persuaded, my Brethren, that God is now "waiting to be gracious unto you:" and that if you turn unto him, he will have mercy upon you^t, yea, he will make his "grace to abound even where sin has most abounded^v."]]

2. How just will be the condemnation of the impenitent—

[God's direction to every one of us is, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity^u." And what can he require of you less than this? Would you yourselves forgive an offending child, while he obstinately refused to acknowledge his fault? What then will you say to God in the day of judgment, when he shall refuse to admit you into the regions of light and bliss, and shall consign your souls over to that bottomless pit, from which you made no effort to escape? How pungent will be the recollection of those invitations and promises which you now despise! — — — O do not by your obstinate impenitence

^q Isai. lx. 19, 20.

^r Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

^s Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.

^t Ps. lxxxix. 13—16.

^u Jer. xlii. 27.

^v Isai. lv. 7.

^v Rom. v. 20.

^z Jer. iii. 13.

make work for everlasting and unavailing sorrow. Do but call to mind the mercy vouchsafed to David: the very instant he said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord," Nathan was inspired to reply, "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die^a." And this affecting incident David himself records for the encouragement of all to make supplication to their God: "I said, I will confess my sin unto the Lord; and so thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin^b." Surely if such an example joined to the gracious declarations in the text do not lead you to repentance, your mouths will be shut in the day of judgment, and (whatever you may now do) you will acknowledge your condemnation to be just.]

^a 2 Sam. xii. 13.

^b Ps. xxxii. 5.

CCCCLXXXVI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING IN FAVOUR WITH GOD.

Job xxxiv. 29. *When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him?*

GOD orders and appoints all things throughout the universe. Nations are not so mighty as not to need his superintending care, nor are any individuals so insignificant as to be disregarded by him. The words immediately following the text shew that the text itself is equally applicable to nations or to individuals. The history of the Jews is a striking comment on them in the former view. The experience of every man attests the truth of them in the latter view. Waving the less profitable consideration of the text, we observe,

I. None can trouble those whom God comforts—

God is pleased to bestow peculiar quietness on his own people—

[He sprinkles their souls with the blood of his dear Son^a: hence they enjoy peace with God, and in their own consciences^b. By his Holy Spirit also he sheds abroad his love in their hearts^c: hence they maintain a filial confidence towards him^d. Moreover he convinces them of his own continual care

^a Heb. x. 22.

^b Rom. v. 1.

^c Rom. v. 5.

^d Rom. viii. 15, 16.

over them^e: hence their minds are established in the most trying circumstances^f.]

This quietness is widely different from the false peace enjoyed by the world—

[There is a kind of peace possessed even by the ungodly^g, but it flows only from inconsiderateness or delusion; it vanishes as soon as light breaks in upon the soul: hence the wicked cannot be said to enjoy true and solid peace^h. But the peace of God's people consists in a resignation to his will, affiance in his promises, assurance of his love, and an expectation of his glory: hence the Apostle speaks of it in the most exalted termsⁱ.]

When God vouchsafes it to their souls, none can trouble them—

[The question is much stronger than the strongest affirmation: it is a triumphant challenge to the whole universe^k. They who enjoy God's presence may disregard the pressures of poverty^l: nor will they be discouraged by the persecutions of man, or the temptations of Satan^m. Every child of God therefore may adopt the Apostle's wordsⁿ: he may assume the triumphant language of Messiah himself^o.]

On the other hand, God's determinations are irresistible also with respect to his enemies; so that,

II. None can comfort those whom he troubles—

Though God does not leave it in the power of creatures to trouble his people, he does not see fit altogether to exempt them from trouble. He sometimes, for wise and gracious reasons, hides his face from them—

[David had frequent occasion to lament the loss of God's presence^p. It was a subject of complaint with the Church of

^e Rom. viii. 28. ^f Job v. 19—24. ^g Luke xi. 21.

^h Isai. lvii. 21. ⁱ Phil. iv. 7.

^k It is not said here that none will *endeavour* to trouble the Believer; for it is certain that both the world and Satan will exert all their influence for this end; 2 Tim. iii. 12. 1 Pet. v. 8. Nor is it said that God's children shall never *have cause* for trouble, for they are liable to pain, sickness, &c. as much as others; but it is affirmed, that none shall greatly or materially trouble them; and this assertion is verified by daily experience.

^l Hab. iii. 17, 18.

^m 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 31.

^o Isai. l. 7—9.

^p Ps. xxx. 7. and xiii. 1.

old^a. Even our Lord himself cried out by reason of dereliction^r. There is therefore an awful propriety in the prophet's address to God^s.]

Nor can any comfort them at such seasons^t—

[Job speaks of himself as quite disconsolate under the hidings of God's face^u. David also describes the anguish of his heart on a similar occasion^x: and universal experience confirms the truth of Job's assertion^y.]

The wicked, however, are more awfully exposed to these tokens of God's displeasure—

[They are *now* indeed, for the most part, insensible of God's absence from them: but at the hour of death they will feel the whole weight of his indignation^z. God will then assuredly hide his face from them, and bid them to depart from him^a.]

And who will comfort them, when they are in such a tremendous state?

[Sinners even *here* are often made utterly inconsolable^b; but, in the *eternal world*, *GOD* will afford them no comfort. The *angels* will certainly administer none^c; nor can their *fellow-creatures* help them in the least^d. They cannot derive any comfort from *reflections on the past*; nor can they find consolation in their *prospects of the future*. Thus can they find no comfort *from without*, or *from within*.]

APPLICATION—

1. To those who are seeking rest and quietness in the world—

^a Isai. xlix. 14.

^r Matt. xxvii. 46.

^s Isai. xlv. 15.

^t The last clause of the text admits of two different interpretations: it may import, either that none can behold God with comfort, when he hides his face from them; or, that if God hide his face from any one, men will no longer look upon him, or at least that they cannot so look upon him as to impart comfort to him. The sense we adopt includes both. God will not, and men cannot, comfort those from whom God hides his face.

^u Job iii. 23, 24.

^x Ps. cii. 1—11.

^y Job xii. 14.

^z Rom. ii. 8, 9.

^a Deut. xxxii. 20. Matt. xxv. 41.

^b This is awfully exemplified in Judas, Matt. xxvii. 3—5.

^c The angels will rather be the executioners of God's vengeance, Matt. xiii. 41.

^d Their wicked companions will only increase their misery, as may be inferred from the solicitude which the Rich Man manifested respecting the probable condemnation of his five brethren, Luke xvi. 27, 28.; and the righteous will not afford them so much as a drop of water to cool their tongue, Luke xvi. 24, 25.

[How poor a portion is the world in comparison with God! and how absurd would it appear if any one should affirm of the world what is here affirmed respecting God^e! Let every one then acquiesce in the decision of Solomon^f; and let Christ be regarded as the true and only source of rest^g.]

2. To those who now enjoy quietness in God—

[Peace, however firmly established at present, may soon be lost: it can be maintained only in a way of holiness^h. Sin indulged will cause God to hide his face from us. This is the true source of the disquietudes which many feelⁱ. Let all therefore mortify secret and besetting sins. In this way they shall attain happiness in life, in death, and for ever^k.]

^e Should any one ask, 'If the world comfort me, who can trouble me?' we answer, without fear of contradiction, 'Conscience, if awakened by God, may trouble thee; pain and sickness may disquiet thee; the prospect of death may appal thee; and, above all, the wrath of God *shall* trouble thee for ever, if thou continue to seek thy happiness in the world.' If, on the contrary, any one say, 'When the world troubles me, who can comfort me?' we may refer him to that unalterable declaration of the prophet, Isai. xxvi. 3.

^f Eccl. i. 14.

^g Matt. xi. 28.

^h Isai. xxxii. 17.

ⁱ Isai. lix. 2.

^k Ps. cxix. 165. and 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

CCCCCLXXXVII.

THE IMPIETY AND FOLLY OF MANKIND.

Job xxxv. 10. *None saith, Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?*

IN investigating so deep a mystery as that of, what is generally called, the doctrine of the Trinity, we ought, beyond all doubt, to look for clear and solid ground whereon to found our judgment: and happily there is ample proof, throughout the whole Scriptures, that, though there is but one God, there is in the Godhead a distinction of persons, who are severally revealed to us as possessing all the attributes of Deity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are represented as concurring in the great work of Redemption; the Father sending his Son into the world; the Son laying down his life for us; and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, to apply that redemption to our souls: and

this distinction is especially recognised by every one that is received into the Christian Church; every one being, by the express command of Christ himself, baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

In so important a doctrine as this we may reasonably expect to find that, though the clear and full manifestation of it might be reserved for the Messiah, some intimations of it should be given from the beginning of the world. Accordingly, we find that, at the very creation of man, the Sacred Three consulted, if I may so speak, with each other, in reference to this matter: "And God said, Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness^a." Again, when man had fallen, and the punishment denounced against transgression was to be inflicted on him, the same concert between them is marked: "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become *as one of us*, to know good and evil^b." In like manner, when, after the Deluge, the inhabitants of the earth were devising a plan for their own consolidation and aggrandizement, and God determined to defeat it, the language used by Jehovah on the occasion was precisely similar: "The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do. Go to, *let us go down*, and there confound their language^c." Moreover, in many passages where God is mentioned, his name is put in the plural number; as when it is said, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth," it is in the original, "Remember thy *Creators*^d." And the noun thus plural is often united to a singular verb: thus it is said, "Thy Makers is thy husband^e:" and again in my text, "None saith, Where is God, my Makers?"

The particular occasion on which my text was

^a Gen. i. 26.

^b Gen. iii. 22.

^c Gen. xi. 5—7.

^d Eccl. xii. 1.

^e Isai. liv. 5.

spoken seems to have been this. All of Job's friends interpreted his expressions in a way more unfavourable than truth or equity required. Elihu, after doing this in numerous instances, specifies, as a further proof of Job's supposed impiety, that he had complained of God, as not attending to the cry of the oppressed, either in his own case or in that of others^f. In answer to which, Elihu says, that this arose from the people themselves, who under their troubles complained and murmured, but never, in a becoming manner, inquired after God, to seek relief from him. Now, in this answer, as containing a general and a very important truth, Elihu marks, in very strong characters, the impiety and folly of ungodly men: but, in the answer, as intimating also a plurality of persons in the Godhead, there is an extraordinary force, which places their guilt in a most aggravated point of view.

That we may exhibit this truth in its just light, we shall proceed to mark distinctly the *impiety* and *folly* of ungodly men. And,

I. Their impiety—

The assertion must, of course, be limited to unconverted men: but of all classes of them, without exception, it is true. St. Paul, shewing that all, whether Jews or Gentiles, are alike under sin, cites a variety of passages to prove his point, and which fully prove also the declaration in my text: "It is written, There is none righteous, no not one: there is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God: they are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one^g." Humiliating as this description of human nature is, it is strictly true, in reference to every unconverted man: there is none that has any sense,

^f Alluding probably to what Job had said in chap. xxiv. 12. in reference to others; and in xix. 7. and xxx. 20. in reference to himself.

^g Rom. iii. 9—12.

1. Of duty to God—

[Men will acknowledge that there is a Supreme Being; and that they owe him allegiance as their Creator and Governor: but, *practically*, they pay no regard to his authority whatever. His Law is no law to them: they take no pains to ascertain his will: and, if it be stated to them as the rule of their conduct, they pour contempt upon it, and set it at nought, and determine to regulate themselves by a standard of their own. The language of their hearts is, "Our lips are our own: who is Lord over us^h?" "As for the word which is spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not obey itⁱ;" but we will certainly do whatever cometh into our own mind, and "will walk every one of us, after the imagination of his own evil heart^k:" "We know not the Lord; neither will we obey his voice^l."

If this statement appear too strong, look around you, and see where you can find persons truly and abidingly influenced by the fear of God. Verily, whatever appearance of that principle there may be in some who are more religiously inclined, "it is no other fear of God than what is taught by the precept of men^m;" the true vital principle itself is found in none but those who have been "renewed in the spirit of their minds" by the power of the Holy Ghostⁿ.]

2. Of dependence on him—

[As men will acknowledge the existence of God, so will they, in *words*, confess his providence also. But who receives every thing as from God? Who looks to him to order every thing in his behalf? Who realizes the idea, that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the special appointment of God? Who has not his attention so fixed on second causes, as almost to overlook the First great Cause of all? It is undeniable, that men are universally "leaning to their own understanding," or "making flesh their arm," or "saying to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence:" and that, to be satisfied with all that God does, and, in the absence of all human help, to trust simply and confidently in him, is an attainment far out of the reach of the natural man, whoever he may be.]

3. Of desire after him—

[Where do we ever hear the language of the Psalmist? "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, that I may behold thy power and glory, like as I have seen thee in the sanctuary^o?" Does

^h Ps. xii. 4.ⁱ Jer. xliv. 16.^k Jer. xviii. 12.^l Exod. v. 2.^m Isai. xxix. 13.ⁿ Eph. iv. 23.^o Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2.

“ the hunted deer, panting after the water-brooks, justly represent the desires of men's souls for God^p?” Does their delight in his word, or their earnestness in prayer, or their contempt of all sublunary good, evince that God is indeed the chief object of their desire? Where shall we find the people who can with truth make that appeal to God, “ Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee^q?” The truth is, that they are content to live “ without God in the world^r,” that “ he is not in all their thoughts^s,” and that, if they were to be assured that there was no such Being in existence, it would give them no concern at all: they would sleep as soundly, and eat their food as pleasantly, and spend the morrow as cheerfully, as if no such information had been given them: yea, rather, instead of occasioning them any pain, it would accord with what God himself declares to be the wish of their hearts; “ The fool hath said in his heart, No God^t.”]

A more distinct view of our text will further exhibit to us,

II. Their folly—

It is the peculiar prerogative of God to “ give songs in the night”—

[This is the office, and this the blessed employment, of each person in the Sacred Trinity. The Father, as the source and fountain of all good, is, to all who seek him, a “ God of grace, and of all consolation,” “ forgiving all their sins, healing all their diseases, redeeming their lives from destruction, and crowning them with mercy and loving-kindness.” The Lord Jesus Christ as our Great High-Priest, sprinkles his own precious blood on the soul of the repenting sinner, and “ gives him beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” The Holy Spirit also will descend and dwell in the contrite soul, to revive and comfort it: with those also who are bowed down through manifold temptations, to succour them with great might, and to make them victorious over all their enemies. Indeed our Triune God assumes to himself that endearing name, “ The God that comforteth all them that are cast down^u.” There is no tribulation so heavy, but he can make our consolations to abound above all our afflictions^x. Behold Paul and Silas when in prison, their backs torn with scourges, and their feet made fast in the stocks; that was certainly to them a night of deep

^p Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

^q Ps. lxxiii. 25.

^r Eph. ii. 12.

^s Ps. x. 4.

^t Ps. xiv. 1.

^u 2 Cor. vii. 6.

^x 2 Cor. i. 4, 5.

affliction: yet, so far were they from being dejected, that "at midnight, with a loud voice, they sang praises to their God, insomuch that all who were in the prison heard them^y." And thus will God support all his afflicted people: he will cause "light to arise unto them in darkness," yea, and in the darkest night, "will himself be a light unto them."

But where besides shall we find a god that can do this? As for "the gods of the Heathen, they cannot do either good or evil:" and all the creatures in the universe are no better than "broken cisterns, which can hold no water." With God alone "is the fountain of life; and in his light alone shall we see light^z."

Yet is this consideration wholly insufficient to stir up their desires after him—

[Though God would be a Father unto them, and treat them as his sons and daughters, they will not seek his face: and though the Lord Jesus Christ would wash away their sins, and clothe them in the robe of his own unspotted righteousness, they will not follow after him: and, though the Holy Ghost would accomplish in them the whole work of salvation, they will not implore his gracious influences. The vanities of time and sense they will seek with avidity: but after God they will not inquire, nor will they use the appointed means to obtain his favour.

Now, what extreme folly is this! For, however long their day of prosperity may be, there must come at last a night of affliction; since "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." And what will they do when the night shall arrive? To whom will they flee for succour? or where will they find any solid consolation? Even "in the midst of their sufficiency they are in straits:" and "in the midst of laughter their heart is in heaviness." What, then, will they do, when all created comforts shall vanish, and God himself shall frown upon them? What will they have to comfort them in a time of sickness? what under the guilt of an accusing conscience, and under the apprehensions of God's impending wrath? What comforters will they find then? Who will brighten their prospects then? Whatever satisfactions they may have found in *the day*, who will give them "songs in *the night*?" Above all, who will console them under the loss of heaven; or administer to them in hell one drop of water to cool their tongue? Verily, the neglect of *such* a God, who is the *only* and the *all-sufficient* source of all good, is nothing short of madness itself: as it is said, "Madness is in their heart while they live; and, after that, they go to the dead^a."

^y Acts xvi. 25.

^z Ps. xxxvi. 9.

^a Eccl. ix. 3.

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are yet in the sunshine of prosperity—

[You, under your present circumstances, feel no need of God: and you can sing, as it were, all the day long. But will night never come? Will the period never arrive when you shall say, ‘Oh that I had God for my Friend! Oh that I had God for my Portion!’ You cannot but know that that time must come; and that, if your day close before the Sun of Righteousness has arisen upon you, it were better for you never to have been born. Why, then, will you delay to seek the Lord? Why will you not turn, and inquire early after God? Why will you not be as wise for eternity as others are for the concerns of time? You see persons anxious enough to provide for their bodily wants: why will you not be careful for your souls? Were God held forth to you only as a Governor and a Judge, you should want no further inducement to seek his favour: for you cannot but know that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” But, when God is set forth to you under the endearing characters of a Father, a Saviour, a Comforter, how can you withstand his invitations to accept of mercy? Hear how he himself expostulates with you on your impiety and folly: “O generations, see ye the word of the Lord! Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?^b” Dear Brethren, delay not any longer to turn unto your God: provoke him not utterly to depart from you, and to “swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest:” but “seek ye the Lord whilst he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near.”]

2. To those who are in the night-season of adversity—

[Tell me, Beloved, whether, on a supposition that you have truly sought the Lord, you have not found him a present, “a very present help in the time of trouble?” Has he not been ready to hear your every prayer, and to supply your every want? and has not the light of his countenance been abundantly sufficient to turn all your sorrows into joy? Has he not enabled you even to “glory in tribulation,” yea, and to “take pleasure” in the heaviest calamities, because of the augmented consolations and supports which they have been the means of bringing into your soul? Ye, then, are witnesses for God, that he “giveth songs in the night,” and that he is

^b Jer. ii. 31.^c 2 Cor. xii. 10.

worthy of all possible love and adoration and praise. This is the state in which the Lord's people should be. When you can say, as his Church of old, "In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee; with my soul have I desired thee in the night; and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early;" then it is well with your soul: whatever your outward circumstances may be, you are, and must be, happy: no increase of corn or wine or oil could put such gladness into your hearts as that which you experience in the light of your Redeemer's countenance. Go on, then, and "let your light shine more and more unto the perfect day." And may "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ your Saviour, and the love of God your Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost your Comforter," yea, may all the richest communications of our Triune God, be ever with you! Amen and Amen.]

CCCCCLXXXVIII.

THE SOURCE AND REMEDY OF DESPONDING FEARS.

Job xxxv. 14. *Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him: therefore trust thou in him.*

IN controversy there is need of the utmost candour; nor without it can we ever hope for a favourable issue. The friends of Job were grievously defective in it; and therefore utterly failed, either to convince him, or to be convinced themselves. But Elihu, who was an attentive auditor of the dispute, and who, on account of his youth, judged it indecorous to offer his sentiments till he saw that his elders were silenced, took up the matter with incomparably better temper and judgment, and, instead of bringing railing and unfounded accusations as the others had done, called Job's attention to many expressions he had used, and endeavoured to convince him out of his own mouth. This was wise, and well adapted to the end proposed: and it is observable, that when God reproved the manner in which the other three had conducted the controversy, he said nothing to the disparagement of Elihu, nor required any sacrifice on his account.

It is certain that Job, though far from being a hypocrite, as his friends had represented him, had not always spoken quite advisedly with his lips. His self-justification had been occasionally too strong, and his complaints of God's conduct towards him somewhat irreverent: he had yielded also too much to despondency. He had complained that he could not understand God's dealings with him, and that he had no hope or prospect of deliverance from his troubles^a. This is noticed by Elihu in the words before us; and the proper remedy for such desponding fears is pointed out to him: "although thou sayest thou shalt not see God, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him;" that is, Place in God that confidence he deserves; and all will yet be well.

From the words thus explained we shall be led to consider,

I. The *source* of desponding fears—

There is far more of despondency in men than is generally supposed: perhaps it is, as much as any other thing whatever, a ground of their continuing impenitent in their sins.

The *ostensible* ground of men's fears is usually a sense of the extreme difficulty of their case—

[Thus it was with Israel at the Red Sea, at the waters of Marah, at the borders of Canaan also, when the spies represented the cities as impregnable, and the inhabitants as irresistible. Thus it was even with the pious Hezekiah, when his sickness appeared to be unto death^b: and thus it is with multitudes amongst ourselves, who imagine that their circumstances are so calamitous, as to be beyond the reach of any remedy. More particularly is this the case with persons under spiritual trouble: they are apt to imagine, that their sins are unpardonable, and that their corruptions are too inveterate ever to be subdued — — —]

The *real* ground is a low apprehension of the perfections of their God—

[This is the interpretation which God himself puts on the unbelieving fears of his people. When Sarah laughed at the

^a Job xxiii. 8, 9.

^b Isai. xxxviii. 10—13.

promise made to her, the answer was, "Is there any thing too hard for the Lord?" and the complaint of God against the unbelieving Israelites was, that "they limited the Holy One of Israel." In fact, a just view of God's perfections would silence all fears: for if his wisdom, his power, his love, his faithfulness be really infinite, we have nothing to do, but to repose our confidence in him, and we are safe — —]

But it is a small thing to know the source of desponding fears, unless we apply,

II. The remedy—

This is prescribed in the words of our text :

1. Contemplate God—

[What we are to understand by that expression, "Judgment is before him," may be ascertained by consulting a similar passage in the prophet Isaiah^c. He will do nothing but what is right and good; nor will he omit any thing which it becomes him to do.

Consider what he has done in a way of power and grace — — — and is he not the same God as ever?

Consider what he has engaged to do: is there any thing that we can need, which is not made over to us by an express promise? Has he not said, that "his grace shall be sufficient for us;" that "we shall have no temptation without a way to escape;" that "as our day is, so shall our strength be;" that "he will give grace and glory, and withhold no good thing" from his believing people? "Hath he then said these things, and will he not do them? hath he spoken, and will he not make them good?"

Consider, above all, the gift of his only dear Son! What else will he, or can he, withhold from us^d? Surely he will be "a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall^e."

Did we but duly consider his glorious perfections as already exercised for his people, and as specially pledged to be exercised for us, we should never entertain a doubt of his constant and effectual care. "His name would be to us as a strong tower, to which we should run and be safe."]

2. Trust in him—

["They that know his name will trust in him:" and to trust in him is the certain way to dissipate all fear. See how a confidence in God operated in the case of David^f: and the

^c Isai. xxx. 18.

^d Rom. viii. 32.

^e Isai. xxv. 4.

^f Ps. xlv. 1—3. and xi. 1—4.

same effect will it produce in us: "if we commit our ways to him, our very thoughts" (which are by nature fluctuating as the wind) "shall be established." This, then, is what we must do: we must "cast all our care on Him who careth for us." It is the very direction which God himself gives to "those who walk in darkness and have no light^g:" and if we follow this direction, "God will keep us in perfect peace^h;" and we shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but standeth fast for everⁱ."]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who overlook difficulties—

[This is the habit of men in general: and hence it is that they are so much at their ease. But it is no easy matter to turn to God aright. To repent and to believe in Christ are works far beyond the ability of man; nor can any man do either the one or the other, but by the influence of the Holy Ghost^k. O let this be duly weighed! Let us remember, that "we cannot even say that Jesus is the Lord," (we cannot feelingly and believingly say it) "but by the Holy Ghost^l:" and let us not delay one hour to seek his effectual aid.]

2. To those who unduly magnify them—

[We certainly magnify our difficulties too much, when we deem them insuperable: for "the things that are impossible with man are possible with God." See the state of Jonah in the whale's belly: could any condition be conceived more hopeless? Yet from thence did he cry; and his prayer entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts^m. Thus let us "never stagger at the promises of God through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving glory to Godⁿ." The greater our difficulties, let our application to him be the more earnest, and our expectations of his gracious interposition be the more enlarged: "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord^o."]

^g Isai. l. 10.

^h Isai. xxvi. 3.

ⁱ Ps. cxxv. 1.

^k Acts v. 31. Phil. i. 29.

^l 1 Cor. xii. 3.

^m Jonah ii. 1—7.

ⁿ Rom. iv. 20.

^o Ps. xxxi. 24.

CCCCLXXXIX.

HYPOCRISY EXPOSED.

Job xxxvi. 13. *The hypocrites in heart heap up wrath.*

SUFFERINGS are to the soul what the furnace is to gold; they serve to ascertain the measure of

its purity or its corruption. If under the pressure of them we humble ourselves before God, and correct whatever we may find to have been amiss, they will promote at once the renovation of our nature, and the honour of him by whose gracious providence they are laid upon us: but, if we murmur at them, and rebel against our God, they will betray a heart unsound and hypocritical. As to the measure of *temporal* advantage that shall accrue to those who patiently endure the Lord's will, or to the *temporal* miseries that shall be sustained by hypocrites, we apprehend that Elihu, as well as the three friends of Job, was, though in a less measure than they, mistaken: but as to the *eternal* consequences of uprightness or hypocrisy, he was perfectly correct: "The hypocrites in heart heap up wrath."

This expression is deserving of the most attentive consideration. But so to delineate the hypocrisy of the heart, as neither to encourage an undue confidence by distinctions that are inadequate, nor to wound the feelings of the upright by too refined distinctions, is a work of great difficulty. We will however, in dependence on God's help, attempt it; and will proceed to describe,

I. The characters here mentioned—

The heart is the seat both of uprightness and hypocrisy: the upright are "the upright in heart;" and the hypocrites, "the hypocrites in heart." Of those whose hypocrisy is gross and glaring, we shall forbear to speak^a. We will rather draw your attention to those whose religion is,

1. Formal and vain-glorious—

[The religion of many consists in an outward respect for certain forms, which, though not necessary in themselves, they think it expedient to observe, in order to maintain a reputation for piety, and to set a good example to the lower orders of the community. Different degrees of strictness obtain among them in relation to these things: some of a more zealous cast, say, as

^a See two most extraordinary instances; Ishmael, Jer. xli. 2—7, (N. B. *his weeping*); and Johanan, Jer. xlii. 1—6, 20.

it were, "Come, and see my zeal for the Lord:" whilst others are contented with the round of duties, to satisfy their own consciences, and to enable them to say, "What lack I more?" But in all this there is nothing of regard for God: it is hypocrisy altogether: and hence our blessed Lord, speaking of such characters, says, "Ye *hypocrites*, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 'This people draw near unto me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me'.^b"]

2. Partial and temporary—

[Certain occasions sometimes arise to excite men to diligence in seeking after God: and, if the making of some particular sacrifices would suffice, they would willingly pay the price. But to "follow the Lord fully," to give up themselves to him without reserve, to "be steadfast and immovable, and always abounding in the work of the world," this is more than they can consent to: and, when required to do these things, they, like the Rich Youth in the Gospel, renounce all hope in Christ, rather than forego the things to which their carnal hearts are more attached. Under the pressure of some heavy affliction, they are like men in a storm; who will rather throw overboard their provisions and the tackling of the ship, than suffer the ship to sink: but they cast not out their sins on account of the hatred they bear to them, but only from an apprehension, that, if not cast away, they will operate to the destruction of their souls: and, when the storm is over, they will be as ready as ever to return to their former habits. But all this argues an unsoundness of principle; and proceeds from hypocrisy in the heart. So the Scriptures uniformly declare^c — — — and so it will assuredly be found in the last day^d.]

3. Weak and ineffectual—

[The object of all religion is to renew and sanctify the soul: and if it produce not this effect, it is of no avail. The delivering us from gross immoralities is but half its work: it must purge the soul from all allowed evil, of whatever kind it be. If our religion prevail not to overcome our high thoughts of ourselves^e, and uncharitable censures of others^f; if it do not enable us to govern and control our tongues^g, and indeed to rescue us from the dominion of every known sin, we are under a delusion, and deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin^h. It matters not how high our pretensions may have been, or how exalted our

^b Matt. xv. 7, 8.

^c Hos. v. 15. and vi. 4. and vii. 16. Isai. xxvi. 16. Ps. lxxviii. 34—37. See especially Job xxvii. 8—10.

^d Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^e Hab. ii. 4.

^f Matt. vii. 3—5.

^g Jam. i. 26.

^h Mark ix. 43—48.

reputation; the mask will at last be taken from our face, and our degradation be proportioned to the eminence from which we fall¹. The stony-ground hearers are not saved by their transient joys; nor are the thorny-ground hearers accepted on account of their stunted fruits: those only approve themselves truly upright, who bring forth fruit unto perfection, and “have respect unto all the commandments^k.”]

Little are such characters aware, what is indeed,

II. Their melancholy employment—

Every sinner may properly be said to be “treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath!” but this is more particularly the case with hypocrites; because,

1. Their sins are more heinous than those of others—

[*They are more insulting to the Majesty of heaven.*—The sins of all are heinous, inasmuch as they trample on the authority of God: but hypocrites pour contempt upon him: they say, in their hearts, ‘Tush, God shall not see: “the thick clouds are a covering to him:” he cannot discern good from evil, but may be imposed on, like any of us.’ But how offensive must such thoughts be to the heart-searching God! and how greatly must they aggravate the guilt of any sins committed by us!

They are also more injurious to the Divine honour.—Those who make no profession of religion may do what they will, and God is not dishonoured, any farther than as his authority is set at nought: but when a man pretending to be religious betrays his hypocrisy, the world cry out against God himself, “blaspheming his holy name^m,” and calumniating his blessed Gospelⁿ.

They are also more destructive to our fellow-creatures.—Sins committed by others, pass unheeded; but committed by them, are made stumbling-blocks to the whole world. It is surprising how the ungodly triumph on such occasions; ‘There, there, so would we have it! they are all hypocrites alike; religion is only an empty name; and they are most honest and most to be depended on, who discard it altogether.’

Thus the sins of hypocrites are really more aggravated as to their guilt than others, and therefore they entail on those who commit them a heavier condemnation.]

¹ Job xx. 4—7. with xxxiii. 14. ^k Matt. xiii. 19—23. Ps. cxix. 6.

^l Rom. ii. 5.

^m 2 Sam. xii. 14.

ⁿ 2 Pet. ii. 2.

2. Their best actions, as well as their worst, augment their guilt before God—

[If they come into the house of God, and offer the most costly sacrifices, they still only heap up wrath against the day of wrath^o. God abhors their very best services^p, and accounts them no better than “the cutting off a dog’s neck, or offering him swines’ blood^q.” Their most common actions also, which have no reference to religion, are hateful to him: “the very ploughing of the wicked is sin^r.” Thus wherever they are, and whatever they do, they are only swelling the number of their sins, and treasuring up for themselves a more accumulated load of misery to all eternity. Unhappy people! they think, perhaps, or may even be confident, that all is well with them; whilst yet their one employment is to add sin to sin in this world, and misery to misery in the world to come. And hence the portion of hypocrites is represented as that which is more terrible than any that will be assigned to any other class of sinners whatever^s.]

INFER,

1. What need is there for self-examination!

[This is the improvement which God himself teaches us to make of this subject^t. O search and try yourselves with all possible care; and, knowing how deceitful the heart is, beg of God to “search and try it” for you, that you may “see if there be *any* wicked way in you, and may be led in the way everlasting^u.”]

2. How earnestly should we pray for the renewing influences of the Holy Spirit!

[So did David^x; and so should we do. The old nature, however corrected, is corrupt still: we must be “created anew in Christ Jesus,” and “be renewed in the spirit of our minds.” To “take away the heart of stone, and to give us hearts of flesh,” is God’s work. O cry to him for it: and be not satisfied with “a name to live, whilst you are really dead;” lest, like the Foolish Virgins, you be found destitute of that grace, which can alone prepare you for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom.]

3. How happy are they who have experienced a work of grace in their souls!

[These are accepted in all that they do; their prayers, their tears, their sighs, their groans, yea, their very thoughts,

^o Prov. xxi. 27.

^p Isai. i. 11—15.

^q Isai. lxvi. 3.

^r Prov. xxi. 4.

^s Matt. xxiv. 51.

^t Gal. vi. 3—5.

^u Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^x Ps. li. 10.

are all recorded in the book of God's remembrance, and shall be brought forth to augment the eternal weight of glory provided for them^y. Ye, then, who are cleaving with full purpose of heart unto the Lord, and striving really to glorify him in all things, rejoice in the prospects that are before you: and "keep your hearts with all diligence," that ye may be found "Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile," and "may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."]

^y Ps. xv. 1, 2. with Mal. iii. 16, 17.

CCCCXC.

SIN OF REPROVING GOD.

Job xl. 2. *He that reproveth God, let him answer it.*

JOB'S friends had failed of convincing his mind. And no wonder; for they adopted not any line of argument fitted to that end. Job was faulty, exceeding faulty, before God, though not in the way that his friends imagined. He had complained of God in very irreverent and unhallowed terms. He had complained of God as "multiplying his wounds without cause^a." He had even condemned God as an oppressor: "I will say unto God, Do not condemn me: shew me wherefore thou contendest with me. *Is it good unto thee that thou shouldst oppress*, that thou shouldst despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked? Thou inquirest after mine iniquity, and searchest after my sin. Thou knowest I am not wicked^b." He even challenges God to a dispute respecting the equity of his own proceedings, not doubting but that, if God will only give him leave to plead his own cause, without oppressing him by his power, he shall prove God himself to be in error concerning him: "Withdraw thine hand far from me; and let not thy dread make me afraid: then call thou, and I will answer; or let me speak, and answer thou me^c." In reply to all this, God takes up the cause: and, with an immediate

^a Job ix. 17.

^b Job x. 2, 3, 6, 7.

^c Job xiii. 21, 22.

reference to such expressions as I have already cited, he says, "He that reproveth God, let him answer it."

Now, as it may be thought that there are none at this day so presumptuous as to "reprove God," I will inquire,

I. Who they are that are obnoxious to this charge—

Impious as such conduct is, there are multitudes who are guilty of it.

1. Those who dispute his word—

[None but the truly humble either do or will receive the word of God without gainsaying. To some it is *too sublime*, containing doctrines which human reason cannot comprehend: to others it is *too simple*, offering salvation by faith alone, without any deeds of the Law. To others, again, its *precepts are too strict*, requiring more than man can perform; whilst, on the other hand, its *promises are too free*, seeing that a man has nothing to do but to rest upon them, and they shall all be fulfilled to him.

But, of all people under heaven, there are none who so systematically and openly blaspheme the word of God as the Papists do. They deny *its sufficiency for the instruction of men in the way of life*, and put on a footing of equality with it their own unwritten traditions. And even *its suitableness*, also, do they deny; affirming that, if indiscriminately read by the laity, "it will do more harm than good." If it be in any translation of the Protestants, they denounce it as "a deadly pasture," that will destroy the flock; and as "*the devil's gospel*," which, whosoever has "*the presumption to read without the permission of the priest, he shall never receive absolution from the priest*"; and, as far as the priest can prevail, he shall perish for ever under the guilt of all his sins^d. What is all this, but to "reprove God," and to say to him, "Thou hast revealed thy word in a way unsuitable to the necessities of thy people, and unfit for their perusal?" This the priests declare, even respecting their own translations of the Bible: and they accordingly take the Bible out of the hands of the laity, and suffer none to read it without their special permission. I marvel that there can be found upon the face of the whole earth persons that will submit to such impious, such deadly, tyranny as this. But this whole Church shall answer for it, ere long.]

^d All this is affirmed by the present Pope, in his charge to all the Popish Bishops and Clergy throughout the world, given in 1824.

2. Those who arraign his providence—

[Here, again, will every man be found guilty before God. It is no uncommon thing to hear even persons who bear the Christian name speaking of luck, and fortune, and chance, exactly as if there were no God in heaven, or as if there were things beyond his reach and control. And, when afflictions are multiplied upon us, how commonly do we repine and murmur against God, instead of saying, as we ought, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Perhaps it will be said, that our complaints are not so much made against God as against those who are the immediate instruments of our affliction. But the creature, whoever he may be, is only a "rod," a "staff," a "sword," in Jehovah's hands: and, though God leaves men to the unrestrained operation of their own corrupt hearts, he overrules every thing they do for the accomplishment of his own will. Even the crucifixion of our blessed Lord was "in accordance with God's determinate counsel and will"; "nor is there evil in the city, but it must be traced to God as the doer of it," so far, at least, at the sufferer is concerned. And as Moses, when the people murmured against him and Aaron, told them that their murmurings were in reality against God himself*, so must I say, that murmuring of every kind, against whomsoever or whatsoever it be directed, is, in fact, a reprovng of God himself, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground, nor does so much as a hair fall from our heads.]

3. Those who condemn his grace—

[The sovereignty of God, in the disposal of his blessings, is more especially offensive to the proud heart of man. We arrogate to ourselves a right to dispense our favours to whomsoever we will: but we deny that right to God. St. Paul places this in a very striking point of view. God had said by the Prophet, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." St. Paul, then, arguing with a proud objector, replies, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will, he hardeneth. Thou wilt say, then, unto me, Why, then, doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his

* Acts ii. 23. and iv. 28. † Amos iii. 6. ‡ Exod. xvi. 7, 8.

will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour^h?" Here is the very point both stated and answered. Man's proneness to call in question the grace of God is here affirmed, and is plainly declared to be a reproving of God himself.]

Seeing, then, that so many are obnoxious to the charge here exhibited, I will shew,

II. What is meant by the warning here given them—

I have before noticed Job's challenge to Jehovah to answer him. Now God, in reply, bids the offender, if he can, to answer *him*. But there are only two ways in which any answer can be given: it must either be in a way of self-approving vindication, or in a way of self-abasing humiliation. Let the answer, then, be heard,

1. In a way of self-approving vindication—

[To return such an answer as this, a man must maintain these three points: God is bound to consult me in what he does—I am competent to sit in judgment on his proceedings—I know, better than God himself does, what it becomes him to do. But who can maintain these points, and make them good against God? Let the two preceding chapters be read, and it will soon appear what claim man has upon God: from whom he derived his very existence, and who keeps him in existence every breath he draws——As to judging of God's ways, as well might a peasant sit in judgment on the works of the greatest statesman or philosopher. Who amongst us would submit to have all his views and pursuits criticised by a child that has just learned to speak? Yet, that were wise and commendable in comparison of our presuming to sit in judgment upon God. And, when a taper can add to the light of the meridian sun, then may we hope to counsel God, how best to govern the world, and how most effectually to advance his own glory.

If, then, we cannot make good our own cause against God, then must we answer him,]

2. In a way of self-abasing humiliation—

[It was in this way that Job replied. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; *what shall I*

^h Rom. ix. 13—21.

answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but *I will not answer*; yea, twice; but I will proceed no further^l. So again, afterwards; "I have uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes^k." O Brethren! this is the answer for every one of us to give: for "God will assuredly be justified in all that he has done, and will be clear when he is judged^l." He will vindicate his own honour, and put to silence every proud objector — — —

Instead of reproving God, therefore, in future, let this be the habit of our minds: let us, under all circumstances, maintain an humble affiance in his goodness, and a meek submission to his will. This is our duty, our interest, our happiness. We expect as much as this from our own children: and shall we manifest less regard for God, than we, poor fallible creatures, exact from them? Let us lie as clay in the hands of our all-wise, all-gracious God, and leave him to perfect his work in his own way; having no anxiety in our minds, but to fulfil his will and to glorify his name. It was by a very circuitous route that he brought the Israelites to Canaan: but we are told, "He led them by the *right* way." And we, whatever trials we may meet with in this wilderness, shall, in "*the end*," have the same reason to glorify our God as Job himself had^m, and as all the saints have had from the beginning of the world.]

^l ver. 3, 4. ^k Job xlii. 3, 6. ^l Ps. li. 4. ^m Jam. v. 11.

CCCCXCI.

TRUE HUMILIATION.

Job xl. 4. *Behold, I am vile!*

THESE are the words of a man whom God had pronounced "perfect and upright." As a fallen descendant of Adam, he partook of the corruption of our common nature: but as a child of God, he was one of the most eminent of all the human race. It may be thought, indeed, that this confession of his proved him to have been guilty of some enormous crime; but it evinced rather his great advancement in the divine life, and his utter abhorrence of all evil. Doubtless there was just occasion for this acknowledgment, because he had transgressed with his lips in arraigning the conduct of Providence towards him: but, if they were suited to his case, much

more are they so to all those who possess not his high attainments.

We shall consider the words as expressing,

I. A discovery then made—

Job had certainly low views of himself upon the whole^a: yet he had spoken in too unqualified terms in vindication of his own character^b. Instances of this Elihu had brought to his remembrance^c; and God himself testified against him in this respect^d. Job had repeatedly expressed his wish, that God would admit him, as it were, to a conference; and had expressed his confidence that he could maintain his cause before him^e: but now that God did interpose, he saw how much he had erred, and that all his former confidence was presumption. He now saw,

1. That his conduct had been sinful—

[Being conscious of the integrity of his heart, in relation to the things which his friends had laid to his charge, he had done right in maintaining his innocence before them: but he had erred in maintaining it *to the extent* he did; he had erred in imagining that he had not merited at God's hands the calamities inflicted on him; and, above all, in complaining of God as acting unjustly and cruelly towards him. These workings of his heart he now saw to be exceeding sinful, as betraying too high thoughts of himself, and great irreverence towards the God of heaven and earth, "in whose sight the very heavens are not clean, and who chargeth his angels with folly." This sin therefore he now bitterly bewailed.]

2. That his whole heart was sinful—

[He did not view his conduct as a mere insulated act; but took occasion, from the fruit which had been produced, to examine the root from which it sprang. He now traced the bitter waters to their fountain-head, and discovered thereby the bitterness of the spring from whence they flowed. This was altogether a new discovery to him: he had no conception how desperately wicked his heart was, and that the evils he had committed would have broke forth with ten thousand times greater violence, if they had not been restrained by the grace of God. The rebellion of which he had been guilty now proved indisputably to him, that he was of himself as prone to

^a Job ix. 20, 30, 31.

^b Job x. 6, 7. and xvi. 17.

^c Job xxxii. 2. and xxxiii. 8—12. and xxxv. 2.

^d Job xxxviii. 2. and xl. 2, 8.

^e Job xxiii. 1—5. and xxxi. 35—37.

sin as any of the human race, and that, if he differed from the vilest of mankind, he had nothing to boast of, since he had not made himself to differ, nor did he possess any thing which he had not received as the free gift of God¹. This is the true way of estimating any individual sin^s — — — and in this way alone shall we ever attain a just knowledge of ourselves.]

But we must further view his words as expressing,
II. An acknowledgment of the truth then discovered—

“ Out of the abundance of his heart his mouth spake.” Feeling his sinfulness, it was an ease, rather than a pain, to him to confess it before God and man. Behold here,

1. The ingenuousness of his confession—

[Here were no excuses made, nor any suggestions offered to extenuate his guilt. He might have pleaded the weight of his sufferings, and the falseness of the accusations brought against him: but he saw that nothing can excuse sin; and that, whatever palliatives may be adduced to lessen its enormity in the sight of man, it is most hateful in the sight of God, and ought to abase us in the dust before him. That his sin on this occasion was an exception to his general conduct, did not at all change, in his estimation, the malignity of it: on the contrary, the enormity of it would appear in proportion to the mercies he had before received, and to the profession of piety he had before maintained.]

Now thus it is that we also should acknowledge our vileness before God. Doubtless there may be circumstances which may greatly aggravate our transgressions; and these it will be at all times proper to notice: but it is never wise to look on the side that leads to a palliation of sin: self-love is so rooted in our hearts, that we shall always be in danger of forming too favourable a judgment of ourselves: the humiliation of the publican is that which at all times befits us: nor can we ever be in a more becoming state than when, with Job, we “ repent and abhor ourselves in dust and ashes.”]

2. The dispositions with which it was accompanied—

[He submitted to reproof, and acknowledged himself guilty in relation to the very thing that was laid to his charge. This is a good test of true and genuine repentance. It is easy to acknowledge the sinfulness of our nature; but for a man, after long and strenuously maintaining his integrity, to confess his fault before the very people who have vehemently accused him, is no small attainment: yet did Job confess, that he had repeatedly offended, both in justifying himself, and in

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^s Ps. li. 3, 5. Mark vii. 21, 23.

condemning God. Moreover, he declared his resolution, with God's help, to offend no more^b: and by this he manifested beyond a doubt the reality and depth of his repentance. Of what use is that penitence that does not inspire us with a fixed purpose to sin no more? Humiliation without amendment is of no avail: "the repentance which is not to be repented of" produces such an indignation against sin, as will never leave us under the power of it any moreⁱ. May we all bear this in remembrance, and, by the entire change in our conduct, "approve ourselves in all things to be clear in this matter^k!"

ADDRESS—

1. Those who entertain a good opinion of themselves—

[How is it possible that you should be right? Are you better than Job, who is represented by the prophet as one of the most perfect characters that ever existed upon earth^l? or if you were subjected to the same trials, would you endure them with more patience than he, of whom an Apostle speaks with admiration, saying, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job?" Know, then, that whilst you are indulging a self-righteous, self-complacent spirit, you betray an utter ignorance of your real state and character, and are altogether destitute of true repentance. Moreover, to you the Gospel is of no avail: for, what do you want of a Physician when you are not sick; or what of a Saviour, when you are not lost? O put away from you your Laodicean pride, lest you be rejected by God with indignation and abhorrence^m. But if, notwithstanding this warning, you are determined to hold fast your confidence, then think whether "you will be strong in the day that God shall deal with you," or be able to stand before him as your Accuser and your Judge? Be assured, that if Job could not answer his God in this world, much less will you be able to do it in the world to come.]

2. Those who are humbled under a sense of their vileness—

[We bless God if you have been brought with sincerity of heart to say, "Behold, I am vile." If you feel your vileness as you ought, then will all the promises of the Gospel appear to you exactly suited to your state, and Christ be truly precious to your souls. Whom does he invite to come unto him, but the weary and heavy laden? What was the end for which he died upon the cross? Was it not to save sinners, even the chief? Yes, verily; "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptanceⁿ" — — — But whilst we would encourage all to come and

^b ver. 5.

ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.

^k 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11.

^l Ezek. xiv. 14, 20. ^m Rev. iii. 17, 18.

ⁿ 1 Tim. i. 15.

wash away their sins in the fountain of his blood, we would caution all against turning the grace of God into licentiousness. Many, in acknowledging the depravity of their nature, make it almost an excuse for their sins. Their acknowledgments may be strong; but they are attended with no tenderness of spirit, no deep contrition, no real self-loathing and self-abhorrence. Brethren, above all things guard against such a state as this. Whilst you are ignorant of your vileness, there is hope that your eyes may be opened to see it, and your heart be humbled under a sense of it: but to acknowledge it and yet remain obdurate, is a fearful presage of final impenitence, and everlasting ruin°. If you would be right, you must stand equally remote from presumption and despondency: your vileness must drive you, not from Christ, but to him; and when you are most confident of your acceptance with him, you must walk softly before him all the days of your life.]

° Rev. xvi. 9, 11, 21.

CCCCXCII.

THE EFFECT WHICH A SIGHT OF GOD PRODUCES.

Job xlii. 5, 6. *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear : but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*

THE deepest lessons of religion are usually taught us in the school of adversity. Affliction draws forth and discovers to us our latent corruptions. These drive us with more abundant earnestness to God. God takes these occasions to manifest his power and grace. Thus we attain to a more enlarged and experimental knowledge of God. This advances and improves us in every part of the divine life. The history of Job remarkably exemplifies this observation: he was a good man before his affliction*—but too confident of his own integrity; but in his trouble God revealed himself to him more fully, and thus brought him to a better spirit—"I have," &c.

I. The discoveries of himself which God sometimes makes to his more favoured people—

There is a hearing of God, which, for want of faith in the hearers, profits them nothing. But there is

* Job i. 8.

also a hearing which is really profitable. Such had Job's been; and such is that which multitudes experience under the Gospel. But there is a *seeing* of God which is very distinct from hearing.

So Job experienced on this occasion—

[There was not any visible appearance of the Deity vouchsafed to him; but doubtless he had views of the majesty, and power, and holiness of God, which he had never beheld before — — —]

Such experience too have all his saints—

[God does “manifest himself to them as he does not unto the world^b,” and reveals himself more fully at some times than at others. What else can be meant by that “unction of the Holy One” which he vouchsafes to us^c? or what by the “Spirit of adoption^d,” the “witness of the Spirit^e,” and “the sealing of the Spirit,” which is an earnest “of our heavenly inheritance^f?” What can be meant by “the light of God's countenance lifted up upon us^g,” and his “love shed abroad in our hearts^h?” These are blessings experienced by the saints in different degrees; and when vouchsafed, are like the sun bursting forth from behind a cloud, or a veil being taken from before our own eyesⁱ. Then are we, like Moses, put in the cleft of a rock, and both hear his name proclaimed before us, and behold his goodness and his glory pass before our eyes^k.]

In the instance before us we see,

II. The effect which those discoveries will invariably produce upon them—

They will discover to us our utter sinfulness—

[Job was high in his own esteem before he saw God^l; but after he had seen God, his sentiments were wholly changed^m. Job expressly declares that his repentance was the result of the discovery afforded him—“wherefore,” &c. Thus Peter's mind was affected with a discovery of Christ's powerⁿ. We have a yet more remarkable instance of this effect in the prophet^o. The experience of every Christian accords with this. Nothing shews us the aggravations of our sins so much as a view of Him against whom they have been committed. Our contrition will ever be proportioned to our views of Christ^p.]

^b John xiv. 22, 23.

^c 1 John ii. 20, 27.

^d Rom. viii. 15.

^e Rom. viii. 16.

^f 2 Cor. i. 21, 22. Eph. i. 13, 14.

^g Ps. iv. 6.

^h Rom. v. 5.

ⁱ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^k Exod. xxxiii. 22, 23. and xxxiv. 5—7.

^l Job xxvii. 5, 6. and xxxi. 6.

^m Job xl. 4, 5.

ⁿ Luke v. 8.

^o Isai. vi. 5.

^p Zech. xii. 10.

They will cause us to **abhor ourselves** in dust and ashes—

[While we know but little of God, we see but little of our own corruptions; but as we become more enlightened, we learn to lothe and abhor ourselves. Even Job, holy as he was, found this effect from his views of God. Paul also, notwithstanding all his probity, was brought to this by a sight of Christ^a. The same cause will produce the same effect in all^r.]

INFER—

1. How do they err who decry all manifestations of God to the soul!

[Many think that divine manifestations are only the offspring of enthusiasm, and the parent of pride: but God does surely manifest himself to some as he does not to others^a. Nor will such manifestations be suffered to puff us up. The more exalted a Christian is, the lower thoughts will he have of himself^t. Let the saints then be careful to cut off occasion for such calumnies^u. Let them seek clearer views of Christ, as the means of abasing themselves more and more.]

2. In what a wretched state are they, who hear only in a customary manner!

[Many there are of this description^x: they discover themselves by their self-righteousness and self-complacency: but every living soul must be brought low before God^y. God has established an invariable rule of procedure towards them^z. We cannot address them better than in the pathetic language of Jeremiah^a.]

3. How unspeakable a mercy do many find it to have been afflicted!

[The generality even of real Christians are prone to rest in low attainments; but God quickens them by means of temporal or spiritual afflictions. Through their troubles, they are brought to much humility and heavenly-mindedness; hence the most eminent saints have esteemed their troubles a ground of thankfulness. Let all therefore justify God in their troubles, and glorify him by submission. Let the afflicted be solicitous to have their trials sanctified, rather than removed.]

4. What views shall we have of God in the eternal world!

^a 1 Tim. i. 15.

^t Eph. iii. 8.

^y Isai. ii. 11.

^r Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 31.

^u 1 Pet. iii. 16.

^z Jam. iv. 6.

^x John xiv. 22, 23.

^z Matt. xiii. 14, 15.

^a Jer. xiii. 15—17.

[The views with which the godly are sometimes favoured in this world are inexpressibly bright and glorious. But what a sight of God will that be, when we shall behold him face to face! Surely all that we have heard or seen of God in this earthly state will be, in comparison of that, no more than a taper compared with the meridian sun. Let us willingly then endure the tribulations that are preparing us for heaven.]

CCCCXCIII.

JOB'S RESTORATION TO HEALTH AND PROSPERITY.

Job xlii. 10. *The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends.*

IF God himself had not interposed to determine the controversy between Job and his friends, it would have been extremely difficult for us to decide with any precision the points at issue between them. There was much of wisdom and of piety on all sides; and on all sides there was somewhat also to blame. Perhaps we should have thought that the fault of uncharitableness was chiefly on the side of Job's opponents: but yet, as they were three in number, whilst he stood alone, we should have been ready to bow to their authority, and to consider the scale as preponderating in their favour. However, happily for us, the difficulties are all removed by that infallible Umpire, to whom all the disputants appealed; and we are able to pronounce with certainty, that, both in temper and argument, Job had greatly the advantage of all his adversaries: nay, so far were they inferior to him in these respects, that they were commanded to request the intervention of his kind offices in their behalf, that through his intercession they might obtain pardon for their misconduct in the whole matter. In compliance with this command, they entreated an interest in Job's prayers; a favour instantly conferred, and productive of the happiest effects, as well to him who prayed, as to them for whom his prayers were desired: "The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends."

We shall conclude our remarks on the history and character of Job, by shewing,

I. The office he performed—

The friends of Job had greatly offended God by their mode of conducting their controversy with him—

[They imagined, that, whilst criminating or condemning Job, they were rendering an acceptable service to God: but they were, in reality, only provoking the Divine displeasure. On the contrary, their injured friend was regarded by God with an eye of pity and of love. This is a very instructive circumstance. *The many* are not always right in their views; nor *the confident*, in their assertions. The persecuted and afflicted saint whom they oppress, may be right in opposition to them all. It can scarcely be conceived, how one false principle may warp the judgment even of good men; or to what erroneous conduct it may lead them. We cannot, therefore, but impress on all the necessity of guarding against the influence of prejudice or party zeal, and of maintaining in habitual exercise the united graces of diffidence and love. Charity in the heart is that which alone renders our most zealous services pleasing unto God; and, without it, whatever we may do or suffer for the Lord's sake, we are no better than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals^a.]

For their ignorance and uncharitableness, God required them to humble themselves before him—

[They were to bring their sacrifices, and to offer up burnt-offerings, in order to appease the wrath of their offended God: yea, they were also constrained to solicit the prayers of Job; nor would God pardon them, till his injured servant Job should have interceded with him in their behalf. Here, independent of the Mosaic law, the great doctrine of an atonement for sin was proclaimed; that doctrine which has been revealed with increasing clearness in all the types and prophecies of the Old Testament, and which is the one hope and consolation of every child of man. The persons who had transgressed were pious; and their sin was a sin of ignorance: yet must they present their burnt-offerings, in order to obtain mercy at the hands of God: from whence we may see, that not even the smallest sin, by whomsoever committed, can be pardoned, but through the blood of that all-sufficient sacrifice once offered upon Calvary: no penitence, no confession, no supplication will avail without that: "without shedding of blood there can be no remission^b."

Moreover the duty and efficacy of intercession are here inculcated. It was not only for the honour of Job, or for the humiliation of his friends, that they were obliged to solicit his intercession for them: it was the design of God to shew, that

^a 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^b Heb. ix. 22.

every man needed the intercession of the saints; and that He who had appointed his only-begotten Son to be the Advocate of his people at the throne of glory, would hear their mutual supplications for each other at the throne of grace.

This office Job most gladly undertook. Instead of feeling any resentment on account of the injury he had sustained, he was penetrated with an affectionate solicitude to avert from them the divine displeasure, and to bring down upon their souls a rich supply of all spiritual blessings. Whether Job officiated as their priest in offering the sacrifices, does not altogether appear: but as their intercessor, he succeeded far beyond his own most sanguine expectations.]

In his execution of this office we are particularly led to notice,

II. The benefit resulting to himself from the discharge of it—

A great and immediate change was wrought in Job's circumstances—

[His bondage and misery had extended to his mind, and body, and estate — — and in relation to them all "his captivity was turned:" his flesh, which had been covered with a most loathsome and painful disease, was healed, and became "fresher than a little child's;" his mind, which had been agitated even to distraction, became calm and peaceful; and his friends, who had all despised and forsaken him, united in making him such presents, as, through the peculiar blessing of God's providence, rendered him twice as rich as he had before been. The same number of sons and daughters also were in due time given him by God, and all such other blessings were added as tended to make him most happy in the enjoyment of them.]

By this instantaneous change, God rendered more manifest his decision of the controversy—

[Now it could no longer be doubted but that Job had been unjustly accused and unrighteously condemned^c. No less than four times does God himself designate Job by that honourable title, "My servant Job;" thereby attesting in his behalf, that, whatever infirmity he had shewn, he had indeed been upright before God, and had maintained a conscientious regard for God's honour. And though we cannot infer from this, that God will always interpose for the comfort of his people *in the same precise manner*, yet we may be assured, that sooner or later he will vindicate the honour of his saints, and "make

^c The friends of Job had been most unreasonable in the testimonies they demanded: yet God had far exceeded them all. Job viii. 6, 7. and xxii. 22, 25.

their righteousness to shine forth as the noon-day." We need not, therefore, be cast down because of any present sufferings which we may be called to endure; for, if not in this world, yet certainly in the next, our meek submission to them shall be abundantly recompensed by our gracious God, "with whom it is a *righteous* thing to recompense tribulation to those who trouble us; and to us who are troubled, rest^d."]]

By this also he put honour on a forgiving spirit—

[The forgiveness of injuries done to us is required by God in order to his forgiveness of our iniquities^e. It may at first appear a hard command, "Bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you:" but who can behold the termination of Job's afflictions, and not see the blessedness of fulfilling that duty? Verily, whatever may be said of the sweetness of revenge, there is nothing so refreshing to the soul as to gain a victory over one's own spirit, and to exercise that disposition towards our brethren, which we ourselves hope to meet with in our offended God.]

IMPROVEMENT—

This subject very distinctly shews us,

1. The manner in which our sins are to be forgiven—

[We do not agree with those who represent Job as a type of Christ: but in this part of his history we certainly behold the way of acceptance with Almighty God: it is through the sacrifice and intercession of that Great High Priest, who has been especially ordained of God to be our Advocate and Mediator. By putting our cause into the hands of our blessed Lord and Saviour, we may all, even the vilest of the human race, obtain mercy with God: but there is no other way of coming unto God with even the smallest hope of mercy^f——— Let us bear this in mind, and not lose sight of it for one moment. Let us set before our eyes the conduct of Job's friends in relation to this matter, and instantly unite in following their example. If we are too proud to seek reconciliation with God in the way which he has appointed, we can expect nothing but that "he will deal with us after our folly."]

2. The wisdom of waiting to see the end of God's dispensations—

[Job, in the midst of his afflictions, accounted God his enemy; but not so when he saw the termination of them. Thus we, under our trials, are ready to say, "All these things are against me:" but in how many instances have we seen

^d 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

^e Matt. vi. 14, 15. and xviii. 35.

^f John xiv. 6. Acts iv. 12.

reason to be ashamed of our precipitancy and unbelief! In how many instances have we found our trials to be the richest blessings in disguise, and have been constrained to acknowledge them all as the fruits of parental love! Let us, then, wait for the issue of our trials, before we presume to judge hardly of God on account of them. The history of Job was particularly intended to teach us this lesson, and to reconcile us to afflictive dispensations of whatever kind: "Behold, we count them happy that endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen *the end* of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." Thus let but *the end* of our troubles be seen, and we shall bless and adore our God for every trial we have ever endured.]

3. The duty and efficacy of intercession—

[To enter fully into the wants and necessities of our fellow-creatures, and to spread them with earnestness before God in prayer, is no easy attainment: but, when this disposition is attained, and is put forth into lively exercise, it is replete with most incalculable benefit to the soul. Verily, if a person groaning under spiritual bondage himself, could stir up himself to make intercession for others, we believe that he would find no readier or more certain way to obtain deliverance for his own soul. At all events, to abound in this holy exercise is our duty^h: and we have all possible encouragement to perform it. The examples of Mosesⁱ, of Elisha^k, and of the Church at Antioch^l, are sufficient to warrant a firm expectation that our prayers, if offered in faith, shall not go forth in vain. We are not, however, left to gather this as an uncertain inference from former events: it is made the subject of a special promise to the saints in all ages: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."^m]

^g Jam. v. 11.

^h 1 Tim. ii. 1.

ⁱ Numb. xii. 13. Deut. ix. 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 26.

^k Jam. v. 17, 18.

^l Acts xii. 5—17.

^m Jam. v. 15, 16.

END OF VOL. IV.





